Michael Cassutt: The Last Mars Trip

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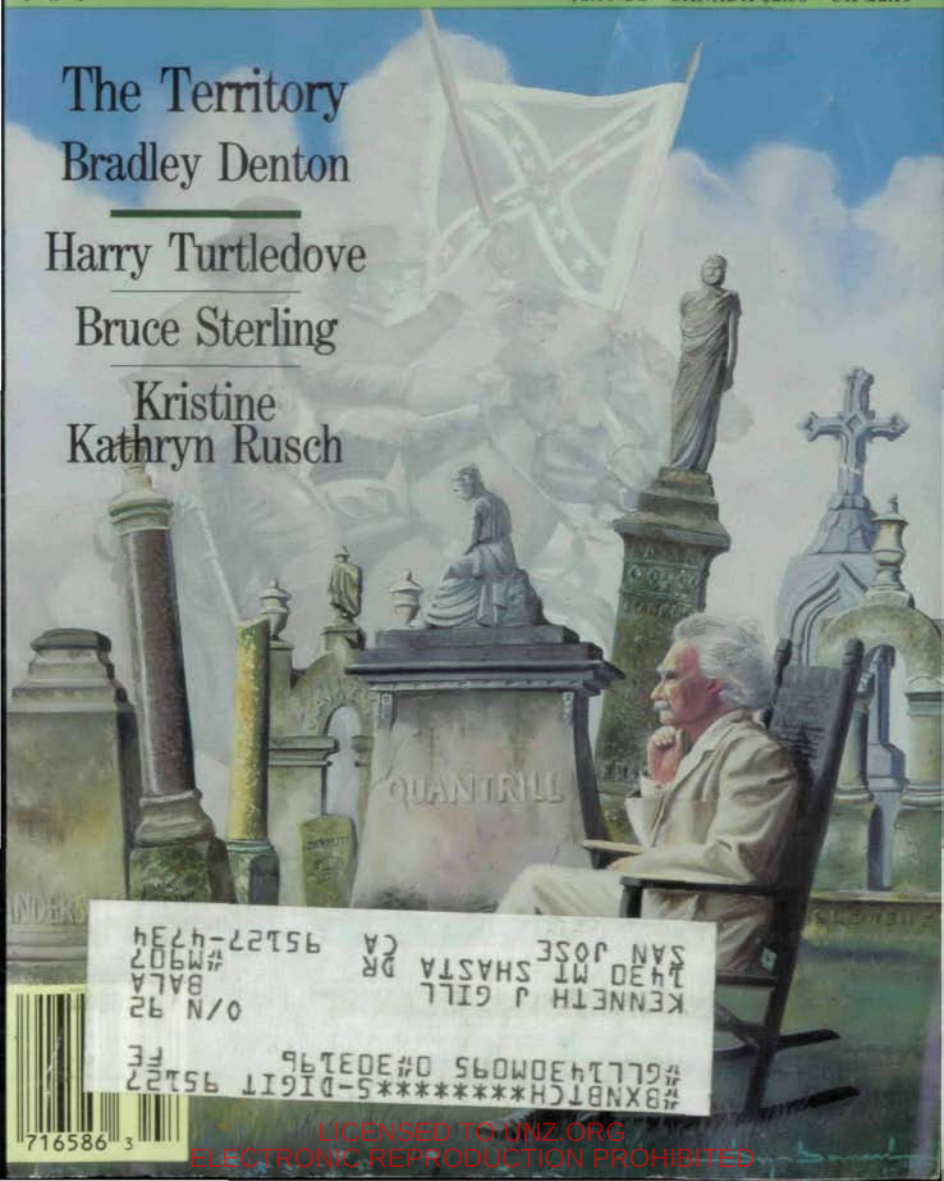


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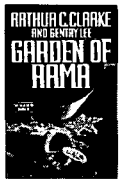


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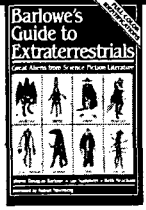


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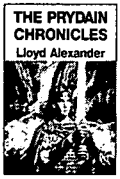


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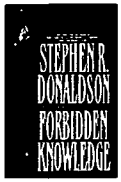


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THE MAGAZINE OF

# Fantasy&ScienceFiction

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# Editorial

## KRISTINE KATHRYN RUSCH

I FIRST ENCOUNTERED the works of Mark Twain on my ninth birthday. My sister Sandy gave me a copy of Grosset & Dunlap's Illustrated Junior Library edition of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. I took the book with me to my Aunt Mary's that summer and read it from cover to cover. My cousin Bill, who was in college at the time, shook his head. "I have to read that for class," he said, "and Kris is reading it for fun."

Indeed I was. I loved *Huckleberry Finn* and read it several times. The copy, which I still have, is battered and dog-eared with continual use. I too had to read the book in college, and I went back to it with a relish reserved for my favorite pieces of literature.

I have never believed that literature should be work. I think English classes have done us a disservice by teaching that literature contains hidden meanings decipherable to only a select few. The select few that teach this way often forget that many of the classics were best-sellers in their day, and the writers popular figures. The same folks who decry Stephen King for his output and success usually teach courses in the work of Charles Dickens who, in his day, wrote as much and was as successful. The teachers ignore, as my college English professor did, the injunction Twain put at the front of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn:*

> NOTICE
>
> Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.
>
> By Order of the Author
> Per G.G., Chief of Ordnance

I don't mean to come down too hard on teachers, for I had several who spoke to my love of the written

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word, and who introduced me to many works that I might never have otherwise read. My sister Sandy, the one who gave me *Huck Finn*, is an English teacher, and she has done more than anyone I know to encourage teenagers to read. The attitude I'm referring to also appears in coffee shops, among would-be and failed writers, and among literary snobs who believe that because they plowed through a difficult and unsatisfying book, the work had merit.

I get angry when people assume that literature has to be difficult to be good. If that were true, I wouldn't have been able to read *Huck Finn* at the age of nine and enjoy it.

Because Mark Twain has written classics, many readers avoid his work. Readers in this genre forget that although Twain wrote humor and satire, he often couched it in fantastic terms. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, called "historical fiction" by the reference books I have in my office, is actually a time travel tale in which a man from Twain's time appears in the court of King Arthur. Much of Twain's short fiction are tall tales with fantastic elements, and some use ghosts, angels, and other supernatural beings to make a point. He wrote mysteries and stories which, if written today, would be considered science fiction.

Mark Twain is featured on this month's cover not because we're reprinting one of his fantastic tales, but because writer Bradley Denton has brought him to life in "The Territory." Denton's story is as readable as Twain's fiction. I hope it inspires those of you who have never read Mark Twain to pick up a copy of *Tom Sawyer*, *The Prince and the Pauper* or any one of a dozen other novels by this wonderful writer. And, I hope it inspires those of you who have read Twain to give a copy of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to your favorite nine-year-old. Maybe her copy will end up as loved and as well read as mine.

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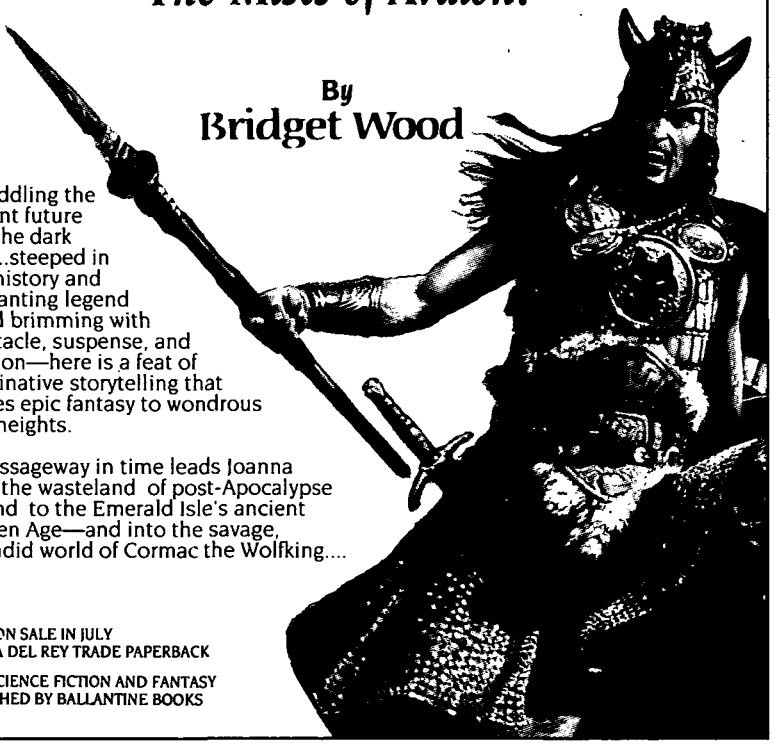

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*Our first tale is an off-world science fiction story of a type only too rare these days. "The Last Mars Trip" is a story about opportunities lost — and found. Michael Cassutt is becoming a staple of our July issues. His last appearance, "Extraordinary Measures," appeared in July of 1991.*

# The Last Mars Trip

**By Michael Cassutt**

SHE HAD NOT had bread in five days, and even then it had been stale. Well, all of it was now. Since the death of her mate, there had been no one left to plant bread, no one left to nurture it, no one — she believed —left to eat it.

Weakly, she wandered southward, moving along the shoulders of the Great One, as much in search of a final resting place as of further nourishment. Her covering, sized when she was neither starved nor pregnant, chafed everywhere, but still she needed its warmth. This did not prevent her from aimlesly grinding it between her greater and greatest claws. Occasionally she regretted the shreds that fluttered away in the wind. But only occasionally.

Near midafternoon, she found herself on the bright side of the Great One, on a long slope cluttered with young rocks. She could see no easy way southward; the way she had come seemed equally difficult. For the

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first time since the death of her mate, she began to seep. The moistness that suddenly covered her froze where her covering had been chewed off. She tried to save herself by scooping up clawsful of the brown salt, packing it on her skin.

It helped only a little, only enough to remind her of the true uselessness of the attempt. Why not surrender to the cold? Join her mate in sleep? But she wasn't quite ready to condemn her kits. She sat, wiggling for comfort in the trench she had made —

— And saw marks on the salt.

The marks were two parallel lines running from downslope up the shoulders of the Great One — interesting in themselves, but mostly because, within each line, tiny clumps of bread had been churned up.

Forgetting the cold, she threw herself on the clumps, every claw worrying at the salt, stuffing herself with pieces of bread. It was stale, of course, but no worse than she expected.

Within minutes, she had eaten all she could. She moved away from the marks, into the rocks, in search of a place to spend the night.

With luck, in the morning, she could continue her journey.

Nine Earth days (they amused themselves by making the meaningless distinction) after becoming the first human to set foot on Mars, Pres Ridley told Giram, "They're already bored with us."

No need to clarify: when Pres said "they," he meant Earth, everyone from the support staff at Kaliningrad to the network vice president at TBS to the whole goddamn 8.4 billion. "This is a feeling you have?" Giram said. He tolerated Pres's attitudes. Sometimes he even found them amusing.

"Feeling, hell. I'm a scientist: they squirted me the overnights. We're down all over North America and Europe. China's still watching, but, shit, they'll watch anything."

"Maybe we need a better time slot." During the uphill phase of the mission, their nightly reports had run opposite "The Friendly Family," the most popular sitcom in the Northern Hemisphere. Which, predictably, had killed them in the ratings.

"Nah, it's the war at the South Pole. It's daylight all the time, and so they can shoot the shit out of each other twenty-four hours a day."

Giram had paid relatively little attention: the war at the South Pole was just another in an endless series of annual regional conflicts. He

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wasn't even sure who was fighting whom this time, and over what great principle.

"Watch that," Pres said suddenly. Giram was already braking to avoid a slide that had spilled across the trail. "Must have loosened it on our way up."

The rover, loaded with rocks from the upper reaches of Arsia Mons, bounced heavily across what was, in effect, a hole in the road. Three jolts. The rover slewed sideways, its tailfin banging dully against a boulder. Giram killed the forward motion and waited for a warning light.

Pres was at his best in situations like this. "Just like driving on the railroad tracks." He chinned his microphone: "*Eagle, T-Bird.*"

"*Eagle* is here," Tanya's voice came to them. "Is everything all right?" Tanya was monitoring their progress from the lander five miles away, aided by the orbiting *Millennium Falcon* and a *Sputnik* relay satellite.

"No worse than driving to Star Town from Moscow," Pres told her. Giram had spent time at the Soviet training center, too, and knew that Pres didn't exaggerate: the roads were still the worst in Europe.

"Very funny."

"Just a little bump in the road. ETA is thirty minutes."

"I'll put dinner on." And that was Tanya's little joke.

"Bitch," Pres said, one microsecond after killing the rover-lander channel.

"She's not so bad."

"That's what I like about you, Giram. You're a peacemaker. You can't drive, but you get along with everybody. Guys like you will be living here someday . . . if anyone does."

Sometimes Giram couldn't tell if Pres was joking. "Do you want to drive?"

"Hell no. I'm gonna take a nap." And he proceeded to tilt his chair back and raise his feet to the instrument panel — quite a trick in a Mars Extravehicular Mobility Suit. Giram grunted and put the *T-Bird* in reverse.

He backed up to the spot where they'd left the trail, pausing a moment. Logic told him that a rock had rolled down the hill, not an impossibility, given the fact that Arsia Mons was a live volcano. (But there were seismic probes all over the area. Tanya hadn't mentioned a quake, and neither had *Falcon* or Kaliningrad.)

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Trouble was, Giram couldn't see any rock, just lateral ditches in the brown soil.

Wind? Winds on Mars boiled and blew to frightful speeds. But not at Site Valentine, where they had spent most of the day, just six miles up the mountain. Again, where was the data from Tanya?

He would ask her. He put the rover in forward gear and started off. Then braked, slowly.

Something the size of a letter envelope fluttered in the breeze. Giram drove forward, grabbing his scoop as he did. He snagged the object as he passed, holding it up for Pres's inspection.

But Pres was asleep.

Giram stowed the scoop and continued on toward the *Eagle*. He clutched the fluttering thing in his hand. While keeping an eye on the trail, he examined the object, expecting a page from a manual or a piece of genuine Mars Sortie Demonstration '18 litter. It should be red; Mars was *supposed* to be the Red Planet, but the dusty sky had the same color as a cloudy day in Europe, and the rocks were closer to chocolate than red.

What Giram saw was a piece of brown cloth. Or a chocolate feather.

When she awoke, the Greater Moon was falling from the sky, and the Great One was gone. Much too late to be starting again: she was amazed that the beast hadn't killed her as she slept. She had to hurry, to be moving.

But she was still too weak, as if the recent meal had only made her feel worse instead of better. It was all she could do to crawl back to the markings, where new bread had been turned up. The churning was not of the wind, which alarmed her, but neither was it caused by beast. She accepted it as a gift from the Moons, perhaps, and managed to claw free several more crumbs, nothing more.

She rested for a while. Then, feeling stronger, she decided to follow the trail. It was already leading generally downslope. Perhaps she would find another field rich in bread. She could not, in any case, stay where she was.

IT WAS Pres's turn to cook, and, as usual, the American made a halfhearted attempt, grabbing whatever packages happened to be on top and tossing them in the microwave, whether they needed heating or not.

As usual, Giram complained about the nutritionists' selections. "Too

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rich for me tonight," he said.

"Really?" Pres said. "Bastards never get it right for you, do they?"

"It's O.K. Why don't you let me fool with it?"

Pres grunted. "No problem." And went below, to "exercise."

"Why do you let him treat you like this?" Tanya asked, the moment Pres cleared the hatch.

"Like what?" Giram examined the packages, replacing the ham with fish ("Let's leave it for our last night here") and adding souvlakia ("For you, Tanya").

"Like a slave."

Giram smiled. "Just because I'm black?"

"You know what I mean."

Well, there were no new arguments at the four-month point in a year-long mission. Of course, during the Earth-Mars boost, there were six to share chores; not only had Pres been able to exploit others beside Giram, Tanya had others to whom she could complain. "So he doesn't like cooking. He does other things well."

"Name two."

"He keeps Kaliningrad off our backs." This was true: Pres had four college degrees — he had even been a professor — which gave him substantial weight in any argument with mission control, in addition to what must have been a hereditary (he was Swiss German in spite of the English family name) or regional (from the dismal prairies of North Dakota) orneriness.

"He just doesn't like to be told what to do. It is not beneficial in a situation like this."

"Well, let's just say I owe him."

"For what?" ESA astronaut Giram Tesfaye owed the American Pres Ridley nothing. But as a child, Giram had been saved from kwashiorkor by food from America. His four brothers and sisters had not, nor had any child under the age of six in his whole Tigrean village. Giram knew this wasn't rational, but then, he rarely thought of himself as rational.

"Don't be such a collectivist, Tanya." The oven beeped. "Dinner?"

He had stashed the object — the feather, whatever — in the outer pocket of his MEMS, but had no opportunity to examine it with any privacy. He and Tanya were scheduled to sortie in the morning, and even

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Pres would insist that they be in bed, asleep, on time. So Giram set his watch to beep him half an hour ahead of schedule.

It wasn't necessary. He found himself sleeping fitfully in his coffin on the mid-deck. Tanya was right above him, zipped up and asleep. On Landing Plus One, Pres had strung a hammock on the flight deck, "in case you and Catherine the Great want to put that first Mars fuck on your résumés." Giram had never considered it — nor, he was sure, had Tanya. Given the noise, the odors and the general decor, it would be like making love inside a dumpster.

Even though he had no sexual feelings for Tanya, Giram felt a bit of guilt over withholding his discovery from her. Perhaps because sharing it with Tanya would mean automatically sharing it with Takiguchi in the *Falcon*, and, nine minutes later, with every specialist in the back room at Kaliningrad.

Telling himself he wasn't jeopardizing the safety of the mission — all the data were quite clear: there was no life on Mars, certainly no life close enough to allow for, say, the transmission of a plague — Giram unzipped the pocket on his MEMS and took out the Object.

It was a ragged piece of brownish something, more like skin than feather, he now saw. Its shape was roughly triangular, perhaps three inches across at its widest, with torn edges. Holding it up to the light revealed no textures or patterns. He rubbed it between his fingers and found, to his surprise, that it was soft, like a chamois. He took a chance and tried to pull it apart. It didn't even stretch.

Interesting, and perhaps irrelevant. But for the first time since leaving the *Falcon*, Giram wished he were back aboard the *Falcon*: at least the mother ship had a microscope.

This was wrong. She must be dreaming. She must be dead. She had followed the trail, and it had led her into a nightmare.

Here at the end of the trail was something not beast and not like her, a fat tower that reflected the morning sun with such purity that it hurt her to be this close. And where could she hide? Surely it would know—

She backed away quickly, clawing at the salt, trying to burrow beneath a rock. At any moment, she expected to feel a claw on her back . . . but nothing came.

She found a shelter, of sorts, a shadowed spot between two rocks. It

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even held a dusting of ice. As suddenly as it came, the fear left — another sign of how deteriorated she was — and she began to feel good for the first time in days. Perhaps it was the ice, always welcome. Perhaps it was the escape from certain death. Perhaps it was only her time. She waited. After a while, she slept.

Site Burroughs proved to be a trial. Not the site itself, which was exactly as advertised, but the constant second-guessing from the *Falcon* and Takiguchi via *Sputnik*. On his last two sorties, Giram had been teamed with Pres, who managed to have "uplink anomalies" whenever the NASDA mission commander got too corporate for him. Tanya, who was lead for this sortie, merely sucked up the abuse and the litany of changes like a good little soldier. If Giram had balked, it would have looked bad for her, so he went along. And consequently, they got about half of their work done.

They were also late getting back to *Eagle*. "I'm pushing the margin on my consumables," Tanya told Giram as the lander appeared above the rocks. Maybe it was true: she had been revved up for the whole eight hours. More likely, she just wanted to use the head on *Eagle*. Sanitary facilities in a MEMS were downright dangerous when they weren't laughable.

"Go on in. I'll configure *T-Bird* for tomorrow."

She didn't try to change his mind. "You're a saint."

Giram spent the next five minutes — the time it took to reach *Eagle* —looking for marks in the chocolate sand. What kind of marks, he wasn't sure: giant three-toed footprints, maybe. He felt light-headed all of a sudden. Either he was nervous about something, or he was pushing the margin on his consumables, too.

As Tanya bounded up the ladder into *Eagle*, Giram attached the charging cable to *T-Bird* and did the pro forma walk-around.

"*Falcon* goes LOS in three minutes, Giram." Pres was suddenly on the line, sounding, as he always did whenever Big Brother was listening, like Neil Armstrong. Did he wonder what was up? If so, the news that the *Falcon* was going out of contact in a few minutes was helpful.

"On my way in."

Giram busied himself for the next 180 seconds doing inventory on *T-Bird*. Time for Plan A. "Pres? I think we dropped a bag somewhere."

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"What kind?"

"Core samples, I think."

"Did you leave it at Burroughs?"

"I don't think so. I remember writing a label during the last stop. Shit." Giram rarely cursed; he knew it would shake Pres up a little.

"Come on in. We can get it tomorrow."

"I think it probably fell off between here and the ridge. Why don't I just go look? Otherwise, you guys'll be all screwed up tomorrow."

Giram counted to six before Pres answered. "How are your consumables?"

"Fifteen minutes before redline." He started walking up the trail.

"The light's in the window."

He found the sack of core samples easily enough, considering that he'd let it slip off *T-Bird* halfway between the ridgeline and *Eagle*. He snapped it to his belt and turned around. *Eagle*'s stub nose loomed above the rocks less than three hundred yards to the east. Giram knew he was effectively invisible to Pres or Tanya: the cameras on *T-Bird* were too low to see him, and the two real-time monitors on *Eagle* were pointed north and south. Only the store-dump cameras would even show him at all, and then no one would know for weeks or months.

If he did this right.

"You O.K. out there?" Pres again, breaking up a bit.

"Just fine." The machinations you had to go through to get five minutes of free time . . . no wonder robots were better suited for spaceflight.

Giram looked first to the south of the *T-Bird* trail, scuffling along in the cold chocolate dust, and finding no marks that could not have been caused by wind. Forty yards of that, and he crossed over, ranging to the south.

He glanced at his consumables. Twelve minutes to redline.

He was closer to *Eagle* here, but in a blind spot. No chance of Tanya looking out the window and asking him where he was going. (No doubt she and Pres were keeping watch.) The soil seemed looser and dustier. He found himself sinking in . . . like snow, he realized. Like the snow he'd seen around Nordvik one winter.

That's when he saw the marks, a cluster of scrapings that gave way to

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# Paralyzed with fear, weak with hunger, she did not move until the Greater Moons rose.

two groups of parallel scrapings marching their way into the rocks. Go ahead, be anthropomorphic: the Martian came this way, saw the ship, turned, and ran. Ran this way.

Oops, don't say Martian. Takiguchi wants only the new nomenclature. Emboss. MBOS. Mars-Based Organic Structure.

He was being stupid, he knew. Someday he would laugh at the memory of his futile search for life on Mars —

Then, of course, he found it. A lump the size of a small dog covered in the same fabric as the sample in his MEMS pocket. A lump with at least three arms that he could see. A lump that was visibly crouching away from him.

"Did you say something, Giram?" Pres's voice, through static.

"Sorry. Did I?" He held out his hand, just like in the movies. The MBOS didn't react.

"Sounded like you were laughing."

"It's an Ethiopian thing." Wait . . . it clawed at the dirt, as if backing away from him. He spread his arms and stepped back himself, as if to say, Don't worry about me.

"Time to come back in."

"In five." He knew he was ready to redline his consumables. No point in killing himself today when he could come back tomorrow. If the MBOS were still here. He fumbled in his pocket for the Object, unfolding it and presenting it to the MBOS. "I think this is yours," he whispered. He set the Object down in front of the MBOS, then turned and headed back to *Eagle*.

Paralyzed with fear, weak with hunger, she did not move until the Great and Greater Moons rose. Even then, her only desire was for escape. But her route was blocked by the very rocks that had given her shelter: she had to go the way the beast had, to use its tracks. It was terrifying, but she did it, one claw at a time.

She quickly reached the spot where the beast had dropped something, and saw that it was a piece of her garment.

She clutched it, and found it so rich in scent that she almost fainted again. *The beast smelled like bread.* She wept as she rolled the fabric in her claw, and

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moved on.

"So you found gold."

Two hours later Pres cornered Giram in the mid-deck near the MEMS. Tanya was on the flight deck, out of earshot, cleaning up dinner. Giram had been doing a suit check, recharging the canisters.

"Excuse me?"

"You found something out there, didn't you?"

"Why do you say that?"

"Because ever since you got back, you've been acting like a guy who just won the lottery. So I'm guessing it's gold."

Giram was too tired to play games. Besides, he needed someone to trust. "Better than gold."

He had the pleasure of seeing Pres, probably for the first time in years, react with surprise. "No shit? I was kidding. You really found . . . what? Frozen oil? A poppy field? Martian crack: there's a concept. *What?*" he hissed.

"Better."

Pres blinked. "Better. A skull, maybe? Wait till Takiguchi hears about this. Our ratings will go —"

"I found an MBOS."

"Speak in English, Goddammit —"

"A Mars-Based Organic Structure. A Martian."

Just like that, Pres was no longer excited. His eyes narrowed. "You know, oxygen narcosis is a funny thing —"

"I'm a doctor, too, Pres. I know what I saw."

"What exactly are we talking about here? Somebody looking over the same real estate?"

"No. A native MBOS."

"Come *on* —"

"It's the same color as the rocks. From a distance, it looks just like them —"

"Giram!" That was Tanya calling from the flight deck. "Takiguchi wants his debrief."

As Giram reached for the ladder, Pres grabbed his shoulder. "I want to believe you."

"Nothing's stopping you."

Pres grunted. "Are you going to tell Takiguchi?"

"I don't know."

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* * *

Giram hated the debrief procedure: he sat in front of a camera and spoke to a real-time image of Takiguchi that was split-screened with the operator and support staff at Kaliningrad — which was nine minutes behind. So ever since the landing, he had tried to finish in eighteen minutes, before the assholes on Earth had a chance to start firing questions at him out of sequence. This never quite worked, because Takiguchi always had one more question . . . and Kaliningrad saved up questions from the previous day.

The first seventeen minutes went well, with Giram giving his second thoughts on the efficiency of various experiments and assignments. He thought he had gotten away cleanly, when Takiguchi suddenly said, "Channel B, Giram," theoretically cutting Kaliningrad out of the conversation. Then: "Why did you stay out late?"

"I dropped a sample bag —"

"I know what you said. I just don't believe it."

Giram knew his physical parameters were monitored during the sorties — MEMS was wired for it. It hadn't occurred to him until this moment that the same monitoring system could double as a lie detector. "You're right. I deliberately dropped the bag."

"I'm listening."

"I think I just wanted some free time. We're so programmed we can't even take a walk."

Giram listened to the hiss of the carrier for ten seconds, long enough to wonder if there had been a loss of signal. Finally Takiguchi said, "I understand. This is Mars, after all. But remember that Kaliningrad holds me responsible for everything you do."

"Sorry."

"You're not a free agent. Thousands of people put their lives and souls into this mission. It's tough to remember, but you work for them. We can't have any black zones: record every step." Another pause. "You can edit when we go downhill, you know."

"I guess I didn't think of that."

"Just get through the next two days."

*Falcon* went LOS, leaving Giram with his face burning, like a schoolboy sent to a corner. It was a typical Takiguchi performance — Pres called it the No-Yes-No Play. He's on your side; he's on their side; you don't mind being spied on, do you? It's all for the good of the mission. If you

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complained about him, people thought you were a crank.

Giram knew there was nothing Takiguchi could do about his "lapse" right now. Two days from now, when *Eagle* docked with *Falcon*, it would be different.

Takigichi hadn't wanted Giram on the mission, anyway. Giram was qualified, of course, through the European Agency, but so were hundreds of people. His background was too unstructured, too unfocused. Giram had not dreamed of going into space all his life, the way Takiguchi (who was both a test pilot and a Ph.D. astronomer) and Tanya and even Pres had. It had merely been an opportunity that presented itself, the same way a chance to go to medical school in France had suddenly appeared to an eighteen-year-old Ethiopian refugee. The same way a job with ESA designing medical equipment had happened to open up seven years later. Giram could just as easily have become a U.N. doctor — the U.N. had been behind the original medical scholarship — or even gone into business.

His selection had been a bone thrown to the Third World, nothing more. Consequently, he had always felt like an unwanted guest in the crew . . . when he didn't feel like a traitor to the great god of the mission itself.

But then, as a child, Giram had never looked at the stars. He had never had the strength.

She regretted having touched the fragment given her by the beast. Not because it hadn't refreshed her; it had. But because it had awakened things within her, things she had thought dead. Memories of her dead mate, physical stirrings of the kits she carried. Now they might be born . . . and now they would surely die.

Knowing she was condemning herself and her young . . . unable to do anything but crawl, she barely moved that night. Morning found her within sight of the silver rock that held the beast. She waited for it to come to her.

The Day Eleven sortie took Pres and Tanya to Site Weinbaum, which Giram could only monitor. Every few minutes, it seemed, during the eight hours they were gone, he would slip from one window to the other, various cameras in hand, hoping for a sign of the MBOS. Nothing showed up visually or thermally, which was not surprising: neither system was able to see through rock. Imaging radar would have helped, but the nearest

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one was overhead in *Falcon*.

He wasn't that desperate.

And when Pres and Tanya returned right on the time line, Giram wanted to scream with frustration. Obviously, Pres hadn't been able to find the creature, meaning there was only tomorrow's sortie remaining, and that one was half-duration. To pick up the garbage.

They didn't even have a chance to talk before dinner because Pres —for the first time since leaving Earth orbit — insisted on taking his turn as cook. That left Giram to recharge the suits with Tanya on the mid-deck. All she offered was a tired smile. "One more day."

"Sick of Mars?"

"Just tired."

He began to think he should tell Tanya about the MBOS. She wouldn't necessarily run right to Takiguchi, not if he begged —

"Giram, did you see anything funny out there yesterday?"

"Funny in what way?"

"Geologically." She popped a disk from her helmet cam into the player. The picture panned across the *T-Bird* trail looking back toward *Eagle* from the east. It had been taken on the trip out to Site Weinbaum, because shadows fell away from the camera. Giram felt his heart go into arrhythmia: in the upper left of the screen was a reddish lump that had to be the MBOS. "See that?" Tanya said.

Giram could only grunt as Tanya tapped the screen in the lower right. "Look at the edges on this wash. Doesn't that look eolian to you?" Eolian. It took a moment for his geological training to come back: wind-formed.

"Uh, no."

"I don't think so, either. It looks like a new cut, maybe from a quake. Best one I've seen so far. Pres pointed it out." A bit stunned, Giram watched her use the board to give the image the appropriate keywords —SORTIE/DAY 11/SOIL — then stash the disk in the case with fifty others. She scampered up the ladder, then Pres slid down, a shit-eating smile on his face.

"Now you know where your MBOS is," he said quietly. "Best I could do today, given." He glanced upward, meaning either Tanya or Takiguchi, or both.

"And she never saw it?"

"Sure. But she was *interested* in something else. It's called *The*

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*Purloined Letter* method. Hide something in plain sight."

"I'll remember that."

Pres looked his age for a moment. "What do you want to do with it, anyway? Since you aren't gonna stick it in a bag and take it back to Earth."

"I don't know yet."

"Well, whatever you do, don't tell."

"It's the reason we came here —"

"Bullshit. We came here to keep people on Earth employed. Which is fine by me, since I'm one of those people. But if they knew about your . . . discovery, this whole fucking planet would be crawling with the cream of humanity in about five years. If we can't keep that from happening, this should be the first and *last* Mars trip."

He grinned. "I got a good look at it, you know. Threw down a scope when Tanya was busy rediscovering chocolate rocks. It was moving. Waving a claw." He was silent. "Reminded me of something . . . it looks sick, listless. Almost like it was starved. Of course, that may be how it's supposed to look."

Tanya appeared in the access. "Are you two coming up or not?"

THE DAY Twelve sortie was the most structured of all, beginning with the last sweep by *T-Bird* to the northeast, the region of Arsia Base that had been surveyed least. There was to be a live-to-Earth farewell-to-Mars broadcast three hours in, which gave Giram and Pres barely enough time to learn their speeches.

"'So we say, good-bye, Red Planet, until we meet again.'" Pres laughed. "Who wrote this, Takiguchi?"

"The fax said it came from headquarters. Probably one of the usual speech writers."

"Sounds like a translation from a foreign language."

"Well, it'll be subtitled for most of the planet."

"The nine people who aren't watching the war."

In spite of Pres's cynicism, the ceremony went well. Kaliningrad surprised them by closing with a live song from schoolchildren, one from each global time zone. Giram found himself longing to be home again, in any of those time zones. Tanya did her part as TV commentator, too.

Then it was time to configure the site, as the time line put it. The midday winds had kicked up a bit, making it difficult to tie down the

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Mylar flaps on *T-Bird*, in case some future visitors from Earth might want to use it again. They were almost through, when Giram heard, "Shit," from Pres.

The U.N. flag had come loose and gone flapping away over the rocks. Air pressure on Mars was pretty low, but pure velocity made up for it. "Giram," Pres said, "why don't you go get that? I'll finish up here."

It took Giram at least a second to realize that Pres had deliberately sliced the line holding the flag. Giram had to act quickly. He had already put together a bag with scraps — food, water, even a blanket — and had been filling it with likely or unlikely objects from the landing site, not knowing, of course, whether any of it would be of use. Wondering if, in fact, it would kill the creature. But he had to do something.

He found MBOS cowering right where Pres had left it, less than a hundred yards downwind and east of *Eagle*. It hadn't moved for a while: there was already a thin sprinkling of brown dust on its coat.

He had no time for the pseudotraditional first-contact niceties; all he could do was dump the "gifts" out and push them toward the MBOS. The creature was still alive: it actually shook as Giram came close, as if it needed calming or comfort. "You're on your own," Giram told it. "Stay the hell away from us." Then he gathered up the U.N. flag and hustled back to *Eagle*.

Giram's helmet cam recorded it all. He left it filed under the keywords SORTIE/DAY 12/CLEANUP. With a little luck, he'd never need to edit it.

Many things happened quickly, all of them surprising. She was not surprised when the beast loomed out of the rocks — she had expected that for days. What was unusual was the way it spilled itself, then went away without killing her.

She wanted to get away from the beast's spoor, but that, too, was unexpected, unlike that of any beast in her experience. The moment she sensed that it had left her bread, she could not control herself. She tore into the spoor with all her strength . . . spitting out and discarding the contents, and feasting on the containers.

She had barely begun to eat, when the silver mountain to the west exploded and disappeared. She had been warned of such things by her mate, and was surprised to survive.

She ate what she needed, and stored the rest in what would serve as a

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good nest.

That night, she gave birth to three kits: one male, two female.

The next morning, she died.

But the young ones fed on the beast's spoor. It kept them alive until they were able to continue on their mother's journey south.

Twenty-two years later, Carter Figueroa, a graduate assistant in planetary sciences at the University of Arizona in Tucson, noted the presence of what appeared to be a living Aresian (that being the preferred terminology, circa 2040) creature in videotapes of the Day Twelve sortie.

For several hours, Figueroa was in a state of delirium, until his natural excitement gave way to suspicion: he couldn't believe that a discovery like this had been overlooked. He suspected it might even be a hoax — a little prank played on graduate students. Given that the diversion of resources to the Asteroid Capture Demonstration meant that the Mars Sortie Demonstration would not be followed up within his professional lifetime, Figueroa elected not to disclose his discovery to anyone.

On the same day that Carter Figueroa put the Day Twelve tape back in its storage box, Giram Tesfaye worked, as usual, at a clinic in a village in Tigre district, Ethiopia.

Unknown to either of them, the MBOS population of Mars stood at eleven — and growing.

*"You have spent much time on sea-going vessels and have experienced many dangerous adventures."*

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*Barry N. Malzberg has written some of the finest fiction I have ever read. His story, "Heavy Metal," in* Alternate Presidents *is a masterpiece. He has another story in that anthology, released this spring from TOR, as well as stories upcoming in* Omni, Alternate Kennedys, Dinosaurs, *and* What Might Have Been *Vols. 1, 2, and 3. He has written over eighty novels. Barry calls "Amos" the most stylistically ambitious work he has attempted in years and the ambition succeeds.*

# Amos

**By Barry N. Malzberg**

BECAUSE: BECAUSE THEY spoke of epiphany, but huddled in the crevices of their ignorance, fingers in mouths, palpitating with terror. *Because:* Winogrand thought, because in that insular bowl of millennial history, they spoke of prophecy, of the need for grand and vaulting truths (Wino*grand,* he had named himself, extending by one febrile letter his more modest born moniker, Winograd), but what they were really after was the same old stuff. Daunting angels and the thin strumming of harps, beneficent smiles from the celestial imps, and for thrills, those apples from the Song of Solomon. Winogrand knew the truth: he knew the purchased angles, knew all the hard and soft luck of this dummied-up century; still, he had to maintain a placid exterior, keep the fizz pleasantly inexpressive, one wink to the host before the commercial break. Back with some more prophecies for the new millenium from Don Winogrand,

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master futurologist. Now a message from the miracle makers who bring it all home to you.

Message from the miracle makers. Don Winogrand, once Winograd, now sent on the road by the Institute to spread comforting intimations of ease and housekeeping convenience, popular science as kitchen aid, government-funded research as light brigade of the mother's helpers; Don Winogrand, that old fraud now forty-seven, smoothed into middle-aged wimpery by the public relations flacks of the Institute, out to do the talk-show circuit to bring a better tomorrow to the assembled; Winogrand, that old thief of the night who in his time had pounded and jazzed with the best of the haymakers and the dissolute; Don Winogrand, now turned roadman for a better tomorrow, had expended his youth and minor gift for paraphrase to this expected end — what he had *not* expected, however, was that in this apparent middle age (what could you call forty-seven? —there was George Blanda, of course, Gaylord Perry, and, for a few bleak moments, Bobby Hull; in the arts, there were guys like Bruckner or Frost who had seemed to find the right notes only when they were past forty, but this was America, dish-towel America, where limpness, limpness was *all*, and Winogrand could no longer sustain the delusion that he was heading up on the arc of his promise, tracking that final, conclusive epiphany with every inch of his aching heart, not with the grim night sweats and the small flickers of depression whisking like silverfish across the screen of his consciousness), he would become — there was no other way to put this, no more fortunate way to phrase the situation —something of a religious fanatic. Acts 22! he wanted to shout before the commercial breaks, while the host was trying to lay a broad beam to a real futurologist. Galatians, verses 6 and 8 from the 2nd chapter! They drew out his bones like sealing wax, cast lots over his vestments! This is not simple stuff, you know. We have passed into a new millennium; Daniel in the Lion's Den was nothing as to Joe America in the year 2002. *Mene, mene* to you, too. But Winogrand had been able, to date, to restrain himself. Such prophecies, such theological outpourings, would have been risky stuff even on high heels in Washington Square Park — try it on the radio, and watch the boards light one, two, three. Winogrand counseled calm to himself, hyped calm the way that Solomon had hawked apples to Bathsheba, soothed himself in the off-camera urgings of the night like a real trouper. Courage, Don; the millennia wait for no man. Courageous Don, the Millennial Man.

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But this was a guise that he did not think, strictly speaking, would last.

Don Winogrand, spokesman for the Institute of the American Academic Sciences, concealed his burgeoning fanatical instincts under his placid fizz, businesslike demeanor, spoke to himself calmly in the crucial minutes before the breaks when the urge to quote Scripture was at its most intense. Breasts were helpful. Thinking of breasts could level him off, keep him in gear, remind him of hazy days and lost avenues of promise up and down which Winograd (no "n" in those happy days of tumescent insight and sudden stabs of really passionate insight) would wander staring at the half-exposed, the semiexposed, the vaguely intimated, the tautly shaped breasts of women of all ages, thinking about his destiny and investing huge stream-of-consciousness time in what he well knew, if applied differently, might have made him some real money. The concentration of his youth had, at least, given him the trick of breasts; he could evoke them in his head, run them across the panoply of inner sight, inspect them gratuitously from all angles — never touching, of course, never responding with external gesture or evidence. Bathsheba must have used similar devices (in reverse, of course) to calm down David, hold him up, manage him for inspection; the architecture of the space shuttles and satellite dishes of which Winogrand spoke so knowledgeably was breast-like, mammillary in many of its angles as well. The thing to do was to keep panning that camera of attention, focus on the breasts, and try to push the dangerous, fanatical theology far to one side. It would do poorly for the Institute of the American Academic Sciences to have its spokesperson, its radio & media contact man, begin to scream of Galatians or the Great Snake of Saint John the Divine in the middle of an until-then sensible interview about the practicality of the L-5 capsule — or so at least the frantic but leveled-down Winogrand would remind himself in his few private moments. Of course, getting close to the breasts was an entirely different story. Many a slip betwixt, and all of that. His private life was a snare and a trap, something not to think of if he wanted to keep his mind on business, and that was for one sure thing. Prophets weren't supposed to have private lives, anyway. When had Jonah checked in with the wife and kiddies on his shipboard way? Had he thought of preserving the gourd for some sweetie down the pike in Tarshish way? Who was there to smooth down Zephaniah's turgid brow after all that ranting and raving? You stayed in your robes, you never showed them the unprophet, the pri-

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vate side of oneself, and you kept the pressure on, just as the Big Guy with the agenda tended to keep the pressure on you. That was a certainty.

Winogrand kept busy. He kept the faith (not in the theological sense — that was one slip he would not make — but certainly in the academic). He revealed none of his distress, his dualism, his slow, encroaching fanaticism, to his contact points in the American Sciences brigade, trouping instead from one city to the next, coach class, minor upgrading permitted in the absence of a full load, checking in at moderate-priced hotels and launching blissful little projectiles of science and industry on those radio and television talk circuiteers that the Institute's efficient public relations arm had scheduled. The television, much of it cable (but with national access), was filled with makeup, clowns, and jugglers, the thump and sweat of audiences concealed behind the cameras, who applauded news of a more convenient tomorrow, but had specific questions on cost — Winogrand did not like it, but it was controlled, and the backlighting held him in place in a way that the radio did not. The radio: small, odorous studios, headphones, the strange, screened calls clattering in at odd angles ("Mike here from *Eau Claire*. How can you say that there's a better tomorrow, when we can't even make a person-to-person phone call? And is there anything to that stuff about the UFO files being unclassified?" gave Winogrand (oh, that "n" had changed everything for him: he had been a cautious, conservative guy, pledge chairman with the Alpha Eps, and then on a career path with General Socony, with a higher-horizons benefit program and an only mildly adulterous marriage, until they had pulled him from the back room, given him an "n," made him a spokesperson, and sent him on the road on behalf of the Institute) a sense toward the end of the programs that he was coming in close toward some final apprehension of the human condition: the millennial beast — just a little bit late, but that was scheduling for you, and if a crosstown bus could get tied up for half an hour, then certainly a millennial promise could get blocked for a couple of years — was snaffling and snaffling, sometimes at the virtual back of his head. Daniel Galatians, Zephaniah, the stoning of Saint Paul! Winogrand wanted to shout over the empty, zooming wires of the net, and even the seven-second delay could not have stopped him, but he was able to control himself on the radio for the same reasons that he managed control less perilously on television: what would happen to him if he promised direct evidence of the Second Coming? How long would he last? What

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would the Institute do with a man of science who shouted that Jesus was definitely, this minute, on the way? For one thing, they would take away his expense account almost immediately, and for another, they would almost certainly remove him from his position of corporate loan — he would have to go back to Socony (whose company psychiatrists would almost certainly disqualify him), and then he would have to make a new kind of life for himself. What kind of new life was possible at forty-seven? At forty-seven Winogrand had had three, maybe four lives — he had had his allotted American share and more; there was simply no possibility of reconstruction, not at this point. Graduate school at his age? Perhaps a law degree? Civil Service, social work with the long-term unemployed and unembarrassable? Even if Jesus *were* to come at some point during these struggles, Winogrand could be sure that it would not be in time to do him any good. The problem was that Winogrand's timing had always been excruciating: nothing had worked out in precisely the right fashion, and now the millennial revolution itself, like the crosstown bus, had failed to show up on time.

Winogrand suffered. There was really nothing to do but suffer; in the night he saw corporate snakes of damnation; in the day he could see personnel psychological profiles that had to do with numbering the beast; in the wondrous kitchens and convenience satellites (a fragment of the refractory Moon in your own refrigerator!) of which he spoke, Winogrand could see the awful sights that had so distressed Lot's wife — but meanwhile, it was absolutely necessary to go on, to maintain the appearance and the demeanor of the proper spokesman for the Age of Science. In that Age of Science: the gleam and glitter of the satellite dishes, the technophile's thin and grateful gaze in the presence of pure machinery; in the clamor and clutter of technology's finest promise, Winogrand sometimes felt hammered to small potatoes; at other times — particularly when the hosts had paid attention to his ariettas on the duality of science and achievement — he felt like Big Onions, Big Casino itself filling miasmically all of the spaces of the ether. I am a spokesman for science who knows that Jesus will come again! Winogrand wanted to whisper to the occasional lady acquaintances he was able to connect with (mostly on the basis of his visual celebrity; don't I know that fizz?) at the motel bars in their delicate, shell-pink ears. Jesus will taketh all of this away with his right hand and grant us the Rapture with his left! But Winogrand said none of

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this whatsoever; even on those rare occasions when the ladies might have been listening (or not listening), there were risks one simply did not want to take if one wanted to stay on the payroll. Which was climbing all the time, what with the judgments Ethel's lawyers kept on getting, and the endless arc in the college tuition payments.

WINOGRAND, RELEASED momentarily from the arc and abscissa of his dilemma (he liked to think in those terms: he had a "dilemma"; he was a "spokesperson"; he was "trying to balance between passion and equity"), found himself in a nearly abandoned synagogue on the South Side of Philadelphia, tallith and yarmulke yanked to a fare-thee-well, Hasidim in seedy garb staring at him with wonder and vengeance in their eyes as, all out of control now, Winogrand raved and ranted about Jesus. Well, it had seemed like a good idea at the time. Born Jewish, trained in the customs of a religion he had (before his conversion under the influence of science) always found amusing as a young man, Winogrand had been dragged in for *minyan* duty while wandering downtown after a late-night talk show at which he had pledged the secrets of the stars, perhaps immortality itself, to the next generation of call-in listeners. Hysterical with the desire to please the Jews and banish once and for all the image of his long-departed father — who had thought the Holy Days were a bunch of crap just as he plunked down for two seats at Yizkor because you never knew — overtaken by visions of snakes and Redeemers even more intense than that he had suffered on phone duty, Winogrand had begun to speak in tongues at the invocation of the altar, and now the Hasidim were really mad; they were determined; they came upon him with all of the intensity and fervidity with which the king's intelligence officers must have conveyed the handwriting on the wall to the choleric Nabucco. "It's all right; it's all right!" Winogrand shouted; "I was just trying you out, seeing how it would go, a kind of juxtaposition, you know; 'Jesus will come again' was a metaphor!" But this did not seem to discourage the nine Hasidim; rather, it inflamed them. They began to strike at him with prayer books. Winogrand, caught between a dollar and a hard-place — as his angry old man had had cause to say before settling in grumbling for his one prayer session of the year — shouted with embarrassment and rigor, trying to distract the Jews, perhaps trying to focus their attention elsewhere, but they were undistractible, as purely focused

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as any spokesman for the sciences in the new millennium, and Winogrand felt: his yarmulke being ripped askew, his tallith being seized at off-angles, his phylacteries being unthreaded from his ears (borrowed goods all), and then he was like the lots-casters' object, himself being speeded in high places toward an egress. For a moment, Winogrand thought he caught it, thought he could really see and feel what was going on, a true hypnagogic gratitude flooding his entrails, but then he was soaring over, and then into, the stony, ungrieving pavement of South Philadelphia, and the insight passed. "And don't come back, you *marin!*" someone shouted in Yiddish, a curse that Winogrand was able to dope out thanks to his old man's counsel and the experience of several years of Yiddish in the back room of Socony on his lunch hour during a period of his life when employees were encouraged to seek their past with the help of instruction. A crown of thorns seemed to have replaced the yarmulke on his head, but the distraught Winograd — now Winogrand with an "n," a spokesperson for purposes both grand and mysterious — was unable to focus upon the irony or the necessity, being otherwise occupied. You tried to stay with the essentials, and you see where it got you. Martyrdom wasn't the ticket, though, and Winogrand had never, not even when talking of the flaming deaths of astronauts on launching pads, ever called it a proper substitute for science or religion.

In his last days on the communications circuit, before it became quite evident that he had outlived not only corporate but personal usefulness (they took out the "n," removed his flight privileges, and put him under his real name in a euphemistically titled Happy Home for the To-Be-Rest-Cured and Needful), Winogrand found that he had reached a kind of placidity; he was no longer eager or expostulatory in his moods or responses. If the moderators asked, they got routine answers; if they didn't ask, Winogrand was quite happy to giggle and think silently of the Rapture, the chair that would in just a little while take him straight upward and out to Heaven. Up and out, his yarmulke reattached to his head, the cross angles of his history and his splendid belief lending him comfort, all of the hicker and dicker and thunder and blunder of modern science falling away as Winogrand himself, ever faster, ever higher, in the hands of Jesus himself, would speed to his final destiny. "For the astronauts would have wanted us to do just that," Winogrand would say if he were asked, if

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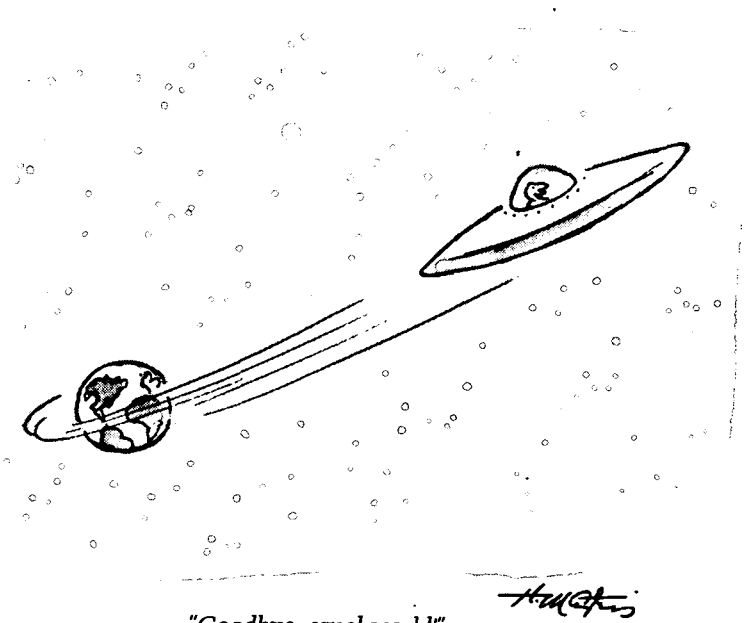
the hosts prodded a little, if the callers got nasty, but he was just as happy not to say it; "they knew what it was like to be a little late, just as Peter wandering in the garden, waiting for that rooster to crow; might have missed a point or two? You go and work for the sciences, beat out the one and the two of scientific discourse, you got to expect you'll get rapped in the shins a little." It was decided that Winogrand was incomprehensible; higher decisions were made at higher levels. In the chair speeding toward Heaven, Winogrand felt disdainful of all of it — the Happy Home, too — the clouds and the blood and the hood and the cross of his blessed destiny were quite enough for him. They never gave him the "n" back; the man was no longer grand, nor was his job. He worked eventually in soup kitchens. There were lots of anticipations of Acts and Galatians and Saint John in the soup kitchens Winograd dished out of, but there was not — discernible to him, anyway — any action.

There is a further part, having to do with his return to the South Philadelphia minyan and the extraordinary, pathetic, embarrassing millennial result, but it has no place in this chronicle.



*"Goodbye, cruel world!"*

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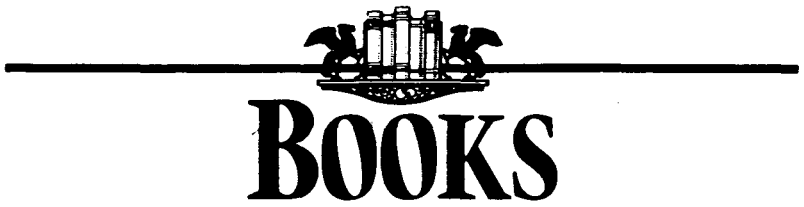

# BOOKS

## ALGIS BUDRYS

*Glass Houses*, Laura J. Mixon, Tor. $3.99

*Jumper*, Steven Gould, Tor, $18.95

*Ole Doc Methuselah*, L. Ron Hubbard, Bridge, $18.95

Plus an interpolated note on Dwight V. Swain

YOU MAY not be able to get *Jumper* as yet; it's an August book. But don't forget.

Laura J. Mixon swam into my ken (whatever that is) in 1981, when she had quit her job in Corpus Christi as an engineer with Dow Chemical and was about to go to Kenya for the Peace Corps. But first she was taking six weeks off to go to Clarion, and I was one of six instructors there.

Laura was one of the students who stick in your mind, though I could not and cannot remember a word of any story she wrote there. Eventually she stayed with my wife and me for a few days before debarking, and for several years thereafter it was the occasional letter from Africa.

When she came back, she settled in Albuquerque, working as an engineer for an environmental company. Over the years, I'd see her from time to time, at places like Conquest and Chicon, and after a while I noticed that Steve Gould was following her around. Then they got married, and both of them moved to New York, where she is (or was) an analyst or something for Salomon Brothers. And through it all, she remained a small, slim, quick-witted girl.

I cannot tell you how many times I have felt great joy that Laura Mixon was alive, and how felicitous I felt the Gould/ Mixon marriage was. And I still didn't remember a word she wrote.

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That has now changed.

*Glass Houses* is a remarkable first novel. You will get some hint of that from the fact that it is an *Analog* serial; I cannot remember the last time Stan Schmidt serialized a first novel, and neither can anyone else. You will also, if you are a book reviewer, get some hint of this from the fact that Tor sent out a special galley, complete with encomia from George R. R. Martin, Walter Jon Williams, and Frank M. Robinson. But you will get your biggest hint when you ponder the fact that this is a female author Stan Schmidt chose to serialize in the closest thing we have to a hard science magazine.

Clearly, this is not your average female author. Even the good ones — and we have a fair number of those, at least as good as any man around — write in the manner of people who don't chose to use the science background as anything but background. They write marvelously well, a fair percentage of the time, but Laura Mixon is not among them.

*Glass Houses* is a cyberpunk novel, well on the top end of the scale. Ruby Kubik is a freelance scavenger — that is, she has a variety of cobbled-together fourth-hand machines which she can interface with. With them, notably with Golem, a towering creature, she goes after valuable parts of the infrastructure of crumbling New York, in a world where the Greenhouse effect and various other forms of pollution have taken hold pretty good.

She lives with Mellisa, a freelance whore she is hopelessly in love with. And one day in this totally hopeless existence she narrowly fails to save the life of an old man, but she does secrete the diamonds from his ears and an envelope he was carrying.

That's all I'm going to tell you about the storyline, for one reason because it's all you need to know. The plot unwinds from that start, and although it has surprises aplenty, it sticks admirably to that theme.

What makes this a notable book is that the pacing, characterization, dialogue and all that other good stuff proceed at just the right developmental speed, and that Ruby is by God a most sensible character, even though she for a long time lacks the wit to kick Melissa in the ass. This is a complete, rounded book — one you will be glad to have read.

Most important of all, this is a most auspicious beginning of what may very well turn out to be an important career.

Who would have thought it? To know someone like that all these years.

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* * *

Dwight Swain checked off this mortal coil the other day. He was an old man as most people reckon these things, and his body — which had carried him to so many more places than most people's — had seriously backed up on him.

You may not know who I am talking about. A year or so back I reviewed a paperback horror novel of his, and spent some time talking about him, but some of you may not have been aboard at the time. At any rate, Dwight occasionally wrote for *Amazing Stories* in the old, old days, and it was one of his novelettes, "Crusade Into the Void," that constituted some of the early reading of the ten or eleven year old Algis Budrys.

More contemporaneously, he taught screenwriting at Oklahoma University, after a career that included a healthy stint in Hollywood. It also came to include many trips to North Africa and Central America in which, typically, a gang of guerillas barely got him and his equally tough wife across a jungle river in a canoe before the other band of guerillas killed them all.

Dwight was no pansy. I am immensely proud to have known him.

*Jumper*, by Steven Gould, is totally different from Laura J. Mixon's book, and equally good. Both come from Tor, but Steve's is edited by Beth Meacham, whereas Laura's is edited by Patrick Nielsen Hayden, and Steve's is a hardcover whereas Laura's is not, etc., etc, but the most important thing is that it's equally good, which is bloody fortunate. I wouldn't have liked to review one without reviewing the other.

(A word seems in order. A, I don't really believe that more than one in ten marriages between writers works for any length of time. B, Usually, when it does work, it does so because one of the pair actually subordinates his or her career to the other. About the only exceptions I can think of are Edmond Hamilton and Leigh Brackett, and C.L. Moore and Henry Kuttner. Fortunately, as I say, you can now add Laura J. Mixon and Steven Gould to that short list.)

*Jumper* is, as I didn't quite say, also a first novel. It concerns itself with David Rice, deserted by his mother, terrorized by his drunken, child-beating father. One day, when he is in the middle of his teen years, David gets away from his father's latest beating by . . . jumping. David, to his surprise and occasionally to his horror, is a teleport.

The book proceeds by working this situation out in advancing

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stages over the next few years. It proceeds, I guess, in the tradition of *Slan* and *Odd John* — two other books you should read — but since *Slan* is about fifty years old and *Odd John* is older, this is not a crucial matter. David in any case is somewhat different from these earlier models.

David at first is sharply limited by his talent, and part of the book's power lies in his learning to work around those limitations. He cannot teleport to anyplace he hasn't seen, for instance. Which means he has to take conventional transportation the first time. This is OK as long as it's New York City, for instance; when it gets to be Algeria and Cyprus, however, it's trickier. How does he get a passport when he doesn't have a birth certificate, Social Security number, or driver's license? How does he get money to live? Etc., etc., et endless cetera.

He solves one problem by robbing a bank. Gould explains that it's a *big* bank, and the numbers are such that nobody really suffers a loss. Somehow, I don't think so. I think he's robbed a bank, and is a criminal; somebody, not he, had to make up the loss. But I don't really care. This is the story of how David copes with life, and if one aspect of coping is criminal, well, it's criminal, and let's go on to the rest of the story.

The rest of the story is about growing up. It's about David's meeting a girl, and David's finding and losing his mother, and David's revenge, and David putting his father in Alcoholics Anonymous, and David's living in the wilds of Texas. It is not a story about David solving the problems of pollution, nuclear weapons, man's inhumanity to man, and the Earth falling toward the Sun — in other words, it is not about anything, really, but David finding ways to live. And it is from that that the book remains a consistent page-turner, and gets my earnest recommendation. I am frankly sick of books in which the hero can boind poith and uses it to save the Solar System, and possibly the entire Known Universe. Give me a simple little tale about a teleport growing up, and I am content.

Incidentally, Gould actually deals, sort of, with such problems as why isn't there a clap of air rushing to fill in the vacuum when David goes, and why isn't there a differential in the speed of the landscape when he moved North or South, and how come he can be falling one instant and standing still the next. So it isn't as if Gould has neglected or overlooked his homework. But I can assure you that there isn't a clap of air, and it doesn't matter about the rest of it, either.

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Nor does Gould deal, really, with the fact that David is the only teleport. Kids have been beaten, savagely, many, many times in the sad history of the world, and not a one of them has developed teleportation as an escape. Kids are beaten every day in David's world, and haven't developed teleportation . . . except for him. Gould mentions this; he doesn't account for it. And that's the right course of action, and I applaud Gould for doing it. If you're going to write a story about David Rice coping with the world, that's what you write about, and there are certain givens. Among them is the fact that if you clutter up your book with more than one teleport — logically, then, there should be a lot of teleports — you are writing an entirely different book, and an inferior one almost certainly.

What I like particularly about this book is the author's good sense, in the face of the sophistication and required standards we nowadays feel are necessary. They're not necessary if the author has sufficient talent. And Gould does.

It was 1948, or so, when in the pages of *Astounding* appeared a series of short stories about the Soldier of The Light and his gypsum-based "slave," Hippocrates. The stories were signed Rene Lafayette, but we knew better. This was L. Ron Hubbard, and L. Ron Hubbard wrote a very good story, every time.

He really did. Even the less-than-perfect stories had a certain flair about them that marked them as out of the ordinary. The fact that a gypsum-based life form could not coexist in the same environment as a humanoid, for instance, meant only that this was true *as far as we knew in 1948.* Besides, what we were truly interested in was that the Soldier of The Light was really Stephen Thomas Methridge, graduated from Johns Hopkins in 1946. Unless it was the events of the story going on in the foreground. Unless it was —

Hubbard had that rarest of abilities — the ability to convince. As in the case of Hippocrates, and as in just about every other case. We automatically, without thinking about it, assumed the most favorable intention for him every time. At least, seventeen year old Algis Budrys did. But he was hardly alone. John Campbell, the editor, bought story after story in the Ole Doc Methuselah series, and published them to considerable public approbation. I suppose it's possible all the readers of *Astounding* were seventeen, but I don't think so.

There were seven Ole Doc stories in all, and they are collected

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here, along with a Foreword and About The Author. There is an awful Gerry Grace cover, in which Hippocrates blends in with the cannon on the deck behind him, and in which the Soldier is far too solemn, handsome, and well-dressed, but you can ignore that. What counts, really, is the seven stories, and those carry the ball quite nicely, thank you, even after forty-odd years.

The formula was that Ole Doc would land on some planet, circling a faraway sun, for no particular reason. But he would soon find one form or another of hanky-panky going on. He was constrained by the tenets of his calling from interfering with native political problems. But if it was a matter of the public health, for instance, that was different and Ole Doc *could* step in. Sometimes it took a considerable stretch to find the angle, but you could be sure that Ole Doc would find it, and, oh, boy, did he then step in.

It wasn't great, world-shattering stuff. And it wasn't technological, moreover, though Ole Doc sported all sorts of advanced equipment and his ship, the *Morgue*, positively bristled with appurtenances. That wasn't the same thing as real technology. As I recall, the only trace of that was that Doc carried hypodermic pistols, which were just coming into being in 1948. No, the purpose of the "technology" was to affirm the fact that there would be advanced technology *of some kind* in the future; that there was a future in which people could travel to the planets of distant suns; that there was a future in which many planets had been colonized by humans so long ago that the individual colonist's grasp of general human history was pretty shaky; that there would nevertheless be law and order, although it might at times be slow in coming.

All that was what the Ole Doc stories promised, convincingly. That was why Campbell bought them, and that was why we not only read them, we devoured them.

And you will, too. Perhaps not in quite the same way, but if you think Time has extracted the magic out of these tales, you are wrong.

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# Books to Look For

## BY ORSON SCOTT CARD

*Martian Memorandum* (Access, PC-compatible); *Rise of the Dragon* (Sierra/Dynamix, PC-compatible); *Circuit's Edge* (Infocom, PC-compatible)

SINCE CYBERPUNK FIRST became a buzzword, it has been almost inevitable that a first-rate computer game *ought* to emerge from the shared milieu of all those stories that had the same look and feel as William Gibson's Neuromancer. Unfortunately, the earliest efforts were feeble indeed. Apparently what we were waiting for was a large enough installed base of computers with VGA-level graphics and decent-quality sound boards for it to be commercially viable to develop a game for top-end systems like that.

And with these three games, *Martian Memorandum*, *Rise of the Dragon*, and *Circuit's Edge*, we have three markedly different approaches that all work, at least after a fashion. If you want to have an interactive experience that at least approaches the imaginative experience of reading the best cyberpunk, one of these games may do the job for you.

All three of these games do a decent job of guiding you through a mystery story with a bluesy Raymond Chandleresque tone; you'll leave a few corpses behind you and encounter women in various stages of deshabille and pliability. All three games have a tough-guy ethic that includes an unfortunate tendency to think of all women as sex objects and all men as rivals — but that's part of the package, I suppose. (Only *Circuit's Edge* and *Rise of the Dragon* carry a warning to parents, but I suggest that parents may want to think twice before turning loose a teenage kid to have his or her view of the relationship between the sexes influenced by *any* of these games — and frankly, I found *Martian Memorandum*, the warningless game, to be the most troublesome in this regard, though not half so troubling as Access's earlier game in this genre, *Crime Wave*.)

*Circuit's Edge* is the one that asserts a point of origin — the title screens declare it to be based on

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characters and situations in the works of George Alec Effinger. This means, for those who have been living under a rock, that the game attempts to recreate the milieu of *When Gravity Fails*, a sort of decadent sin-filled high-tech lowlife quarter in the midst of a "pious" Islamic city. The gamewrights chose a visual design strategy reminiscent of the Ultima series, but with startlingly good three-dimensional movement. As a game, it won my admiration; as cyberpunk, or even as Effinger-punk, it simply didn't have the right feel.

*Rise of the Dragon* has a rather arty, impressionistic visual style that I found at once intriguing and distancing. You are never able to forget that you're looking at art; yet the art itself creates a kind of moodiness that goes well with the story. The game is smoothly playable and the mystery story you help enact is a good one.

My kids' favorite, though, and in most ways mine, too, is *Martian Memorandum*. Here the visual strategy is to use snatches of videotaped scenes by live actors, and then have them speak, and the result is stunning realism — especially because the game uses Realsound technology that tweaks the built-in squawker of the PC to make quite credible speech. The writing is pretty good, the game is easy and intuitive to play, the built-in hint system works well for those who, like me, don't want to spend hours solving every puzzle, and the arcade sequences are enough to satisfy anybody who likes to stop the story and blow some bad guys away (i.e., Swarzenegger fans) — though even then you can skip the arcade-action sequences if, like me, you're getting old and can't compete with games designed for the synapses of teenage kids.

The drawback to using videotaped actors, however, is that they aren't always very good — as more and more computer games (especially with the advent of multimedia) start using videotape this way, gamewrights are going to find they get a competitive edge if they bring in good professional actors instead of casting their friends.

All these games give you a different take on the cyberpunk experience. But if you only have enough cash for one of them, I'm afraid I have to give the nod to *Martian Memorandum*, with the suggestion that if you are going to give it to a thirteen-year-old to play, you might mention that this game isn't the best possible model of male-female relationships.

(I really hate it when a game or a story pushes my buttons and makes me sound politically correct. Especially when it's a game that

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otherwise has so much going for it. But my job is to report on what I thought of the experience, not to make decisions for you. . . .)

*New Life for the Dead*, Alan Rodgers, (Wildside Press, 37 Fillmore St., Newark, NJ 07105, $29.50 for numbered edition, incl. postage; cloth, 134pp)

Good horror short stories are hard to find. This is partly because horror stories, good *and* bad, are hard to find. This isn't really surprising — the fact that the science fiction short story market is still thriving (though shrinking) is an aberration. Americans who read at all tend to want novels.

And yet some really fine short horror fiction *does* get printed — in small press magazines, in anthologies. For short time there was even a newsstand magazine, *Night Cry*, devoted to horror — and, from all accounts I've heard, it paid its own way; when it folded, it was because the parent company went down. On its own, *Night Cry* would have been a success. Certainly from the quality of the thing, it *deserved* to be a success.

Alan Rodgers was the editor who created *Night Cry*. When it went belly up, he turned around and instead of *buying* fine horror fiction, he began producing it. Now John and Kim Betancourt of Wildside Press have brought out a signed-and-limited edition of *New Life for the Dead*, which collects *all* of Rodgers's fiction to date.

Which isn't all that much, to tell the truth. Only five stories, plus seven poems. (I'm not in love with the poems. Maybe it was the fact that in "Prometheus's Declaration of Love for the Vulture" the word Caucasus [the mountains] was replaced with Caucuses [gatherings of politicians]. Perhaps there is some hidden symbolic meaning in this, which I, being ignorant, utterly missed. Anyway, I just lost heart for the poems after that.) A *short* collection.

But a fine one. The first story, the Bram Stoker Award-winning "The Boy Who Came Back from the Dead," is quirky in the extreme, and yet there's a homelike feeling to it. Sort of a sick twist on *Dandelion Wine*. The kid died, smashed like a bug on the front of his car, but some aliens came by and saw him lying there in his grave bored out of his mind but not really *unhappy* and they revived him. He scrabbled up out of his grave and went on home and found out tha his family wasn't as happy to see him as he would have hoped. Oh, they were OK about it, all except Mom. And his teacher — *she* didn't take it well at all. A terrific story with bittersweet

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justice in the ending.

Indeed, that sense of bittersweet justice may be Rodgers's trademark, though I doubt he intends it consciously. I figure he doesn't feel like his story's *done* until we see how it comes out, how things get sort of *smoothed* by the end, even though you don't really like all that the smoothing entails. In the story "Penny Lombard and the Heart Ken Found," it's not as if Rodgers ever explains why the heart was alive, and why Ken found it. But you know that the life of it was somehow tied up with Penny Lombard's having come of age, having gone *ripe*, and her wanting to do something about it. And when Rodgers is done with the tale, it's smoothed out real nice, except for maybe a couple of little bumps that stick in your throat and make you kind of sad.

The thing about Rodgers is, he takes the horror — and it's horrible, all right — and turns it into the light just a little differently than you'd ever expect, and from *this* angle you realize it's more tragic than horrid, more beautiful than hideous. Like "Frankenstein Goes Home." The composite monster was made out of several dead bodies, and those dead bodies once had a life, didn't they? And families? And loves, and memories, and hopes, and dreams?

Rodgers's stories can be off-putting at the beginning — he has a way of asking us to swallow just a little too much all at once. By the end it doesn't feel like too much, but at the beginning we tend to say, Dead people lying there in their graves, talking to each other, *and* aliens who can revive them? A woman who can revive dead babies as zombies for a while *and* the possession of the revived body by something *else*? ("Emma's Daughter"). Just swallow hard; it'll go down well enough eventually.

And well worth the effort. Rodgers isn't one of those horror writers whose stories have no effect beyond making you gag. Indeed, his grue quotient is pretty low. What he offers instead is a teaspoonful of absurdity dissolved in a quart of ordinary life, and ah, the difference that teaspoonful can make.

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*"A New Man" brings science fiction a little closer to home. Orson Scott Card has called Andrew Weiner one of the finest writers in the English language. Since his first publication in* Again, Dangerous Visions, *Andrew has always been on the cutting edge of the genre. His novel* Station Gehenna *(based on a short story of the same name that appeared in F&SF in 1982) was published by Congdon and Weed. His short story collection* Distant Signals and Other Stories *(published by Porcepic Books) first appeared in Canada to excellent reviews.*

# A New Man

**By Andrew Weiner**

DR. SEGAL FROWNED slightly as he unstrapped the blood-pressure cuff.

"It's bad?" Lyman asked.

"No," Dr. Segal said. "In fact, it's quite good. Low end of normal." His tone was more puzzled then enthusiastic. "I'd still like to watch it carefully. But it's certainly looking better."

"That's great," Lyman said.

The doctor squinted at his notes. It was exactly as he had recalled: Stephen Lyman's blood pressure had been creeping up steadily for the past few years. Only three months before, it had been right at the far edge of high-normal. Given the patient's family history of hypertension, his hard-driving temperament, and the stressful nature of his work, Dr. Segal had expected to be writing a prescription sooner rather than later.

Now this rather startling turnaround.

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"Have you been exercising?" he asked Lyman.

"No," Lyman said. "Not really."

"Are you still in the same job?" he asked.

"Oh yeah," Lyman said. "But I'm not pushing myself so hard. I said to myself, O.K., I made vice president. But I'm never going to be president of this company, or any other company. And now that I think about it, I don't even *want* to be president. I mean, who needs that hassle? So these days I don't take so much work home anymore. I've cut way back on travel. And I'm spending a lot more time with my family."

"They must be pleased."

"They were a little confused at first, having me around so much. They didn't know quite what to do with me. But they're getting to like it."

"And how about you?" Dr. Segal asked. "How do you feel?"

"Terrific," Lyman said. "Like a new man."

Up on the video monitor, a muscular-looking man in an ill-fitting dark blue suit was getting out of his car, a gray '92 Impala. He reached into the backseat and pulled out a battered black suitcase. He locked the car and carried the suitcase to the entrance of a low-rise office building.

"What's he got in there?" Inspector Friedman asked, staring at the suitcase. "Kidneys?"

"Livers," Detective McAllison said. "Half a dozen fresh livers."

"What's a liver worth these days?"

"Retail? Three, four hundred thousand. But Linden isn't paying him anything like that much. Thirty grand a pop, max."

They watched as the picture changed. Now it showed the inside of Max Linden's office, where the organ broker was inspecting the goods.

"Disgusting," McAllister said. It was not clear whether he was talking about Linden and his supplier, or the livers.

Linden looked pleased with his purchase. A broad smile lit up his chubby face. He took a fat envelope from his desk drawer and passed it to the other man.

"What's he going to do with them?" Friedmen asked.

"This batch? Export." McAllison looked at his watch. "The courier is on his way to the airport right now. Customs' boys are primed and waiting."

"And Linden?"

"We're going to move in, soon as we get the word on the seizure."

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"Good," Friedman said. He was tired of this case, anxious to wrap it up. There was something distasteful about it.

On the monitor the muscular-looking man was on his way out the door. Friedman triggered the remote to freeze the screen.

"What about him?"

"We're going to get him, too," McAllison said. "We followed him back to his apartment. Midtown high-rise, two-bedroom unit leased under the name of Mike Kinnock. Not on any of our bases. We'll find out who he is, though, soon as we pull him in."

"Where do you think he gets them?" Friedman asked.

"The organs? Not from any willing donor, that's for sure. I mean, a kidney, O.K., maybe he could buy those, from someone who was hungry enough and dumb enough. But you can't live without a liver."

"You think he kills them?"

"Or buys them from people who do, yeah. I don't see any way around it."

"Yes, Pete," Doris Quince said into the telephone. "O.K., Pete."

Sheilah Lyman sat on the other side of the desk, trying not to look as if she was listening.

"I understand you have to have dinner with these people," Doris said. "Just don't expect Johnny to understand . . . Yes, I know it's a parent-and-son banquet, not a father-and-son banquet. I took him last year, too, remember? . . . All right, Pete, I'll tell him, yes. I have to go."

Doris slammed down the phone and swiveled in her chair to face Sheilah.

"Prick," she said deliberately.

"He did it to you again?"

"He did it to me again," Doris said. "I was planning on staying late tonight to catch up on some of this." She indicated her towering in-basket. "Now I've got to take Johnny to the scout banquet and eat greasy fried chicken and watch some yo-yo show."

"What kind of show?"

"I told you, a yo-yo show. Presented by last year's regional yo-yo champion."

"Pete is going to owe you one."

"A few hundred, at this point. But who's counting?" Doris sighed. "I told him I understood, that he has to meet these people from Japan about

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the new premium. But I *don't* understand, actually. Not anymore. It's like nobody else in the world counts except him. As if he were the only person who ever had an important job. And what is he, after all? He's just a vice president for a cereal company. It's not as if he's saving lives, or defending the nation's security. He's just . . . *making cereal.*"

"Cereal is good," Sheilah said. "Cereal is important."

"So he's pulling down a hundred grand a year, so what? I'm making almost that myself. . . ."

"Are you?" Sheilah looked at her friend and colleague with narrowed eyes. As director of human resources, Doris ought to be earning more than she, a mere manager. But not *that* much more. "I had no idea," she said.

"Including the car allowance and the stock plan, of course," Doris said quickly.

"Of course."

"I'm sorry, Sheilah," Doris said. "I shouldn't go on like this. But he makes me so furious sometimes. Where were we?"

"I think we were finished, actually," Sheilah said. "We decided to give the customer-relations audit to Aranson Associates. They weren't the cheapest bidder, but they did good work on last year's attitude survey. . . ."

"Sure," Doris said. "Why not? Let's make Neil Aranson richer. He does good summaries."

"And pretty pie charts," Sheilah said. "In four colors."

"Besides," Doris said, "he has a nice ass."

"Does he? I never noticed."

"Gorgeous," Doris said. "You know he invited me out to dinner? A few weeks ago, when I happened to mention that Pete was out of town. I could have swung it, too; it was Juanita's regular babysitting night. I was tempted, actually. He wanted to take me to that new California Thai place; Adele says it's absolutely wonderful."

"Tempted by the food, or by Neil Aranson?"

"Probably more the food, now that you mention it." She squinted at her in-tray. "Who's got the energy for sex these days, anyway?"

"Maybe you could go there with Pete."

"And have him stand me up for a bunch of wheat traders? I don't plan to do *anything* with Pete, not anymore. You know what he's like."

Doris lit a cigarette, dragged on it, coughed. "I've got to quit," she said. She inhaled again.

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"Steve did," Sheilah said.

"Quit? You're kidding? I never saw Steve without a cigarette in his hand. I thought it *grew* there. How did he do it? Acupuncture? Lasers?"

"He just stopped. He went away on a business trip, and when he came back, he had stopped. Just like that. Said he just lost the urge."

"I hate people who do that," Doris said. She stubbed out her cigarette. "So, did he gain fifty pounds?"

"No. Actually, I think he's lost a little."

"But he's cranky as hell?"

"No. Really good-humored."

"Wait a minute. Steve was *never* good-humored."

Sheilah laughed. "Oh, he was sometimes. But I know what you mean. The thing is, he's changed. Doesn't flare up at small things the way he used to. He's less driven. Spends less time at the office and more time with me and Angie. He's really getting into his garden. He always has a smile for the neighborhood kids, even when they trample his roses. . . ."

"Stop it," Doris said. "I can't stand to hear any more. Someone switched your husband with Mr. Rogers, and you never even noticed."

"It's Steve, all right. But it's the *other* Steve. The one I used to be in love with. He came back. Finally."

"Hard to believe," Doris said, "that just six months ago, you were about to pack your bags. . . ." *When you found out about him and that bimbo at his office,* she was going to say, but stopped herself.

"Yes," Sheilah said. "But he promised he would change. And he did."

Doris looked skeptical. She was thinking back to the dinner party at the Hertzes only a few months before, when Steve cornered her in the library. He had been all over her. And then, after she managed to push him off, he had proposed that they set up a nooner at a downtown hotel for the following week. A nooner, that was what he had called it.

"Can people really change that much?" Doris asked.

"Steve has," Sheilah said. "It's like something clicked in his head. Like he took a close look at himself, and he didn't like what he saw. For example, he's selling the BMW. . . ."

"And buying a Mercedes?"

"No, a Jeep. He wants to look for some land in the country, build a little house, move there when Angie starts college. He's talking about retiring at fifty to raise orchids. . . ."

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"How old is Steve?"

"Forty-two."

"Male menopause," Doris said. "That's probably what it is." She lit another cigarette. "I can hardly wait."

"WILD," FRIEDMAN said, peering into the tank in Kinnock's living room. "Absolutely wild."

Floating in the nutrient bath were half a dozen tiny human hearts, each about the size of a fingertip.

"You're sure?" he asked McAllison. "You're sure they're not. . . ."

"Real? We're sure. He was growing them, all right. Look." They moved along to the next tank. Here the hearts were the size of a man's fist.

"Cloning," Friedman said. "Isn't that supposed to be impossible?"

"With humans, yeah. At least in the current state of knowledge. According to most scientists."

"Obviously this guy knows something they don't," Friedman said. "Too bad we can't ask him what it is."

"I told you, Inspector, we just don't understand how it could have happened. One moment he was there; the next, *poof*."

Friedman shook his head in disgust. Six police officers, led by McAllison, had raided this apartment. Six police officers now told the same sad story. The perpetrator had vanished somehow. Vaporized himself before their eyes. Beamed himself up. Or at any rate escaped.

Additional officers had been stationed at all exits to the building. None had seen Kinnock leave.

"Must have hypnotized you somehow, I guess," Friedman said dubiously. "Never heard of someone pulling off a stunt like that, but if he can clone human organs, maybe hypnotizing a few cops is no sweat."

"At least we got Linden," McAllison said.

"This guy was a hell of a lot more important than Linden."

Friedman continued his survey of the apartment.

Bathroom. Neat, orderly. Damp towels. No soap, no cosmetics, no razor, no shaving cream.

Bedroom. No bed or mattress. Just some kind of flotation tank. And a table piled high with some sort of books. No, albums. Baseball-card albums.

"Wow," he said: "1925, 1918. Wow. This stuff must have cost him a fortune."

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"Look in the closet," McAllison said.

Friedman opened the closet. Three shirts, one pair of pants, one jacket, one raincoat. And piles of old comic books sealed in plastic bags.

"What else did he collect?"

"Records," McAllison said. "Old 45s. There's a stack of them under the kitchen counter."

"Weird," Friedman said. "Kidneys for comic books."

"Maybe it was an investment."

Friedman led the way to the next bedroom. "What's in here?" he asked.

"More of his product line," McAllison said. "Limbs."

"Limbs?"

"Arms, legs, like that."

Friedman pushed the door open and entered the room. McAllison hung back in the doorway, as if reluctant to enter.

More growth tanks. He walked up to a large tank filled with almost-full-grown human arms and stared in at it.

"There's a market for arms?" he asked McAllison.

"Guess there must be."

Friedman tapped on the glass. "Print them," he said.

"What?"

"Print them. See if you can find out who they belong to."

"Belong to?"

"The DNA," Friedman said. "The tissue culture. Whatever Kinnock used to grow these things. Who did he get it from? Himself? Someone else? See if you can track the prints."

McAllison looked uneasily at the floating limbs.

"One more thing," Friedman said. "You get any more video on Kinnock?"

"Should have, yeah. We put a camera in the building across the way, aiming through the living room window here. To record any visitors. Except, he didn't have any. None that came through the door, anyway."

"Get the tape. Maybe it shows how he got away. Or something else. . . ."

"What kind of something?"

"How the hell do I know until we run the tape?"

"I'm sorry, Pete," Lyman said. "I would have loved to go to the game. But I promised Angie I'd take her roller-skating."

"Roller-skating?" Lyman could hear Quince's incredulity over the tele-

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phone line. "I practically had to kill to get the company box tonight. Larry was so grateful when I told him, he would have kissed me if I had let him."

"I'm really sorry, Pete, but I promised."

"Angie'll understand. She'll understand that this is a big game for the Jays; they're just half a game back of Boston."

"No, Pete. I don't think she would."

"Well, if you're sure. . . ," Pete said.

"Yeah, I'm sure. Say hello to Larry for me."

"Maybe we could get together next week for a drink or something. Just the guys. We haven't seen much of you lately."

"Maybe," Lyman said.

But somehow he doubted it. For some reason, he didn't much like Pete Quince anymore. And he was not sure why he had ever liked him.

The guy was a bore. All he talked about was work and sports and, for the occasional light relief, money and sex. He never read a book, except maybe the odd spy novel, paged through in airport departure lounges. He had no interest in art or music or politics or gardening or cooking or religion.

On the whole, Steve thought, he would much rather spend his time with Angie. And Sheilah.

Thinking of Sheilah brought a rueful smile to his face. He had come so close to blowing it . . . even after he had given her his word. It had been almost like a compulsion. He had loved Sheilah, always loved her, but she hadn't been enough for him; nothing in his life had been enough for him. He had always wanted more: more money, more power, more women.

And then suddenly he had been released.

It had happened on that last business trip to Chicago. At first, everything had been as usual: Flirting with the prettiest attendant on the flight out, fighting with the client for every last dollar on the table, getting a little loaded with the guys from the local office in the happy hour, meeting up again with the client for an artery-clogging steak-house dinner. And then the girls from the escort agency had arrived for a night on the town.

That wasn't so usual these days, but it wasn't so terribly unusual, either. The client had let it be known that he expected it, and the client would be paying for it in the end, one way or another, so what the hell?

She had been quite a looker, Steve's escort: long red hair, large breasts,

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long legs, probably not a day over twenty. Her name had been Mary or Marie or maybe Louise. They had been dancing at some local club, and it had been a lot of fun. And he hadn't thought about Sheilah or Angie at all, or about the lying he would have to do when he got back home. Afterward he had taken her back to his hotel room, and they had another drink from the courtesy bar. And then. . . .

Then it had been as if a light bulb had gone off in his head, just like in the cartoons. And he had *seen*, finally, seen it all. How he was wrecking his life, and what he had to do now to fix it. The first thing was to ask the girl to leave.

But that had been only the beginning.

He picked up the phone and dialed the local florist.

"I'd like a dozen long-stemmed roses sent to my wife," he said. He gave the address. "Sign it: 'Love, Steve.'"

"Birthday card? Anniversary?"

"No," Lyman said. "Just because."

Up on the screen, the muscular-looking man was checking a gauge on one of his tanks. He looked up from his work as McAllison entered the apartment, followed by a phalanx of uniformed officers.

The man took a step toward them, turned slightly, and . . . vanished.

"Shit," Friedman said. "How did he *do* that?"

"Maybe he made himself invisible," McAllison said.

"That's impossible," Friedman said.

"If you say so."

"What else you got?"

"Got four hours of tape from before the raid. Haven't run it all yet, but it doesn't look too interesting. Just Kinnock walking back and forth."

"Run it," Friedman said. "From the beginning. Fast forward."

Friedman watched, eyes glazing over, as Kinnock hurtled in and out of the frame. Now he was opening the bathroom door, leaning over the bathtub. Now he was back in the living room shrugging out of his clothes. . . .

"Stop it," Friedman said. "Stop it right there."

McAllison froze the picture. "Jesus," he said.

Naked, Kinnock's body was pink and completely hairless. And without any visible genitalia.

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"You think he's a woman?" McAllison asked.

"Start it," Friedman said. "Normal speed."

They watched as Kinnock tossed his clothes onto the couch. Then he reached up to his throat and unzipped his body.

"Jesus," McAllison said again.

Something yellow, with clawlike hands and feet, crawled out of the opening in Kinnock's chest.

"It's a freaking lizard," McAllison said.

They watched as the yellow lizardlike thing jumped down to the floor and walked unsteadily on all fours into the bathroom, there to disappear over the top of the tub.

"It's an alien," Friedman said. "That's what it is."

Stephen Lyman rested his head on his arms. His arms, in turn, rested on the dented metal table in the police interrogation room.

"Will somebody tell me," he asked, yet again, "what the hell is going on?"

He was not hopeful of an answer. You didn't get answers in nightmares. And that was what this had to be: a nightmare.

One moment, everything had been going so well. He had been at the roller-skating rink with Angie, watching her rocket around, enjoying hearing her laughing with excitement. He had gone to the hot dog stand to get some pop. And then they had arrested him.

Well, not arrested him, exactly. They had swept him out of the rink and into a car and down to the police station, but they hadn't charged him with anything yet.

Neither had they let him make a phone call.

"But that's my right, isn't it?" he had asked.

"Normally, yes," said the policeman called Friedman, the one who had been asking most of the questions. "But not in this case." He had looked almost embarrassed.

"I have to talk to my wife."

"She was informed of the situation. When we took your daughter home."

"Informed of what?"

"That you're helping us with our inquiries."

"Inquiries into what?"

Friedman had gestured vaguely. "Matters of national security."

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"You think I'm some kind of spy?"

"No," Friedman said. "No, we don't think that."

The man sitting beside Friedman at the other side of the table, the tall man with the close-cropped hair whom Friedman had introduced as Agent Jones, had frowned slightly at this. As though Friedman were giving away unnecessary information.

"I want to call my lawyer."

"I'm sorry," Friedman said. "Perhaps later."

It wasn't how they did things on the cop shows. On the cop shows, you always got to make a phone call. And they didn't make you sit still for a medical examination, including blood tests and full-body and dental X-rays, not without a warrant. On the cop shows, they always had a warrant.

Which was another reason why this could only be a nightmare.

"You're not going to tell me what this is about, are you?" he said, raising his head from his arms. "You're never going to tell me."

A man in a white lab coat came into the interrogation room and passed a file to Friedman, leaning over to whisper something in the policeman's ear. Friedman nodded. He leaned over and whispered to Agent Jones. Then he turned back to Lyman.

"One last time, Mr. Lyman. You don't recognize this man?" He flipped over a picture of a plump, balding man.

"No," Lyman said. "I already told you, no."

"Or this one?"

A muscular-looking man with a strangely blank expression.

"No."

"How about this one?"

A new photograph. A fuzzy image. Something that looked like a giant lizard, scuttling over a carpet.

"You ever see anything like that?" Friedman asked.

"No." He shook his head. "No, I never saw anything like that."

"How about this?"

A close-up on some kind of aquarium. Except, those weren't fish inside. Those were *arms*.

He dropped the photograph in revulsion.

"What is this? What the hell is this?"

"Those are cloned human arms," said Agent Jones. "Grown for black-market sale."

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"What does that have to do with me?"

"Everything," said Jones. "All those arms were grown from the same batch of tissue samples. The DNA is identical, and so are the fingerprints."

"So?"

"That's how we traced you, Mr. Lyman. Through the fingerprints. We happened to have a set of yours on file. Riotous behavior, wasn't it?" He looked at his notes. "Chicago, 1968."

"Wait a minute," Lyman said. "Those arms have my fingerprints? How is that possible?"

"We were hoping you could tell us that," Jones said.

"Someone must have stolen — what did you call it? — the tissue sample."

"No, Mr. Lyman," Friedman said, shaking his head sadly. "That's what we thought at first. But it seems to be a little more complicated than that."

I DON'T BELIEVE it," Sheilah Lyman said. "And you're never going to make me believe it."

"But the evidence . . . ," Friedman said.

"So his serum cholesterol is lower, so what? I don't call that evidence."

"It's not just the cholesterol," Friedman said. "Or the changes in his blood pressure and in his ECG. Although all that is indicative enough. There's the old fracture of his left ankle joint that somehow healed like new. . . ."

"So it healed, so what?"

"And the disappearance of his old appendix scar. . . ."

"It was never much of a scar."

"And the fact he somehow regrew two molars in his upper jaw."

"I don't believe it," she said again. "I know my own husband. Angie knows her own father. You're never going to convince us that. . . ." She trailed off.

"That the man who has been living with you for months is an imposter? I know it's hard for you to believe. But you told me yourself that he had changed. Become quieter, gentler."

"People change," Sheilah said. "All the time. That doesn't mean they've been replaced by aliens."

"Not by an alien, Mrs. Lyman. A clone. A clone programmed to think

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and behave exactly like the real Stephen Lyman."

"Not exactly like him," Sheilah said. "If what you're saying is true."

"Not exactly like him, no," Friedman agreed. "Perhaps there was some copying error. But close enough. They took your husband and left you an acceptable substitute."

"Why would anyone want my husband?"

"We don't know," Friedman said. "The chances are, we'll never know. Who can guess how an alien thinks?"

"What are you going to do with him?"

"Him?"

"Stephen."

"The ringer, you mean? We're not exactly sure. It's clear that he doesn't know anything useful to us. We've polygraphed and truth-drugged him six ways to Sunday. He's not lying to us: he really believes he's Lyman."

"So you're going to let him go?"

"I suppose we'll have to, eventually. There isn't anything we can charge him with, except maybe impersonation. And it would be difficult to show intent."

"I want him back."

"I'm sorry?"

"I said, I want him back."

"But he's an imposter, Mrs. Lyman. A fake."

"I don't care," Sheilah Lyman said. "I don't care if he's not really my husband. I still want him back."

A bell chimed softly. Lyman winced and pulled the pillow over his throbbing head. He had drunk just a little too much Glenlivet last night. God only knows how many points he had gone through. . . .

The bell rang again, louder this time.

"Rise and shine, Stephen," said the wall. "It's conversation time."

Lyman groaned.

"You'd better move it along."

Lyman rolled out of bed and staggered into the bathroom. He splashed water on his face, brushed his teeth.

"We're waiting."

He stumbled back into the bedroom and pulled on a dressing gown. He

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would get dressed later, or perhaps not bother. It was not as if his hosts really cared what he wore.

"Surf and turf for dinner, Stephen," the wall reminded him. "With baked potato and sour cream, and crème brûlée for dessert. Assuming you can make up the points. Your account is in deficit again."

As far as he understood it — which was not very well — his hosts did not practice anything resembling the economic system known as capitalism. Except on him. On him, they practiced it all the time.

"Otherwise," the wall reminded him, "it's brown rice and vegetables again."

He pulled on his sun hat and pushed open the front door of the cottage and stood blinking furiously for a moment in the harsh sunlight. He groped in the pocket of his dressing gown and found his shades. Then he set off toward the pool, bounding along easily in the lighter gravity. Sometimes he enjoyed it, this feeling of lightness. Other days, like today, it only made him want to throw up.

There were about a dozen of them in the conversational pool this morning, swimming around in the muddy green water or baking lazily on the rocks. Lyman crossed the bridge and took his accustomed place on the island in the middle of the pool, dangling his feet into the tepid water.

"I will begin," said the plump lizard-thing that called itself Freddy. They all used basic American names like that with him. Lyman wasn't sure whether that was because their real names were unpronounceable, or because they didn't have any names of their own.

"Let us talk," Freddy said, "about baseball. In your reasoned opinion, who is the better shortstop: Cal Ripken or Tony Fernandez?"

An easy one to start off with. An easy two hundred points.

"Fernandez," he said, "no question. I mean, Ripken is good, I'll grant you. But he's not a natural shortstop; he just doesn't have the right build. And even if you're talking hitting, I'd still take Fernandez over a full season. . . ."

What he had to do, Lyman told himself, was really *bear down* here. Earn a whole bunch of points and sock them away. Forget the steak and red wine. Go for bigger incentives. For example: contact with other humans, five thousand points.

"Let's discuss the Rogues' Gallery," said the yellowish lizard-thing that called itself Barney.

"I'm sorry?"

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"The Flash's Rogues' Gallery," Barney said. "Who was your favorite among Flash's many enemies?"

*Give reasons for your answer.* The alien didn't bother to say that, but it was implied; it always was implied.

Oh shit, Lyman thought, remembering the pile of comic books on his night table. I forgot to do my assigned reading.

Well, not forgot, exactly. He just hadn't been able to face it.

"Uh, my favorite villain. Let me think a minute here. There were so many."

"Of course," Barney said. "So many marvelous, colorful villains. Mirror Master, Trickster, Gorilla Grodd, the Weather Wizard. . . ."

"That's the guy," Lyman said. "The Weather Wizard. The guy who could make it snow in colors. He was really cool."

"Extremely cool," Barney agreed, flicking his tail lazily in the sun.

"But Captain Cold was cooler," offered the purple lizard-thing called Marlon.

"No, no," said Freddy. "The Weather Wizard could do everything that Captain Cold could do, and more. . . ."

*Contact with other humans,* Lyman thought as he listened to the aliens argue. That's what I need. Otherwise I'm going to go nuts, sitting around yacking all day with a bunch of lizards.

There were other humans on this planet, his hosts had told him. Only a handful, so far. It was some kind of status symbol, as he understood it, having your own authenticated human being to chat with. Some aliens satisfied themselves with clones. But his own hosts believed that there was nothing like the real thing.

"My topic," announced the alien called Timmy, "is old TV themes."

"The best was 'The Defenders,'" Lyman said. "Still gives me goose bumps, just thinking about it."

Five thousand points, that wasn't so many, to see a real live human being. Maybe it would even be a woman. . . . But thinking about women gave him an uneasy feeling. He couldn't help but remember his terrible last night on Earth, when he had gone back to his hotel room with that girl from the escort service, Laura or Lara or whatever her name had been. They had made out on the couch for a little while, and then he had unzipped her dress. She wasn't wearing a bra. He had noticed, then, that there was something very odd about her breasts. They didn't have any nipples.

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And then, while he was still staring at her breasts, she had reached up and unzipped her skin.

"Whatever *did* happen to P.F. Sloan?" Norman was asking.

"Good question," Lyman said. "I think he retired, actually. But wasn't that a hell of a song, 'Eve of Destruction'?"

"His best was 'Take Me for What I'm Worth,'" Timmy said. "Recorded by the Searchers, 1966."

"'Halloween Mary,'" Freddy said. "Self-recorded, 1966."

"Nineteen sixty-seven," Marlon corrected.

No, Lyman decided, he would stay away from sex for a while. Sex had already got him into deep enough trouble.

What he really needed was just a normal, regular conversation with some other normal, regular guy like himself. Just shooting the breeze, chewing the fat, gabbing about this and that.

The only problem was, he couldn't imagine what they would talk about.

"And you're sure it won't hurt?" Doris Quince asked.

"Oh no," said the pleasant-looking young man sitting on her couch. "It's completely painless."

"And he'll be . . . comfortable?"

"Oh yes. He'll have every possible convenience."

Doris reached her decision. Or rather, confirmed the decision she had already made. As Sheilah had pointed out, there were some offers you absolutely could not refuse.

"He's leaving on the 7:00 A.M. flight tomorrow," she said. "He'll be staying at the Hyatt, the one downtown. If he's not with the agency people, you'll probably find him in the bar."

The young man nodded. "You won't regret this." He stood up.

"And that's it?" she asked, leaning forward in her armchair. "That's all?"

"That's all," he said. "When your husband comes home again, he'll be a new man."

Doris leaned back in the chair and relaxed against the cushions.

"I can hardly wait."

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*"Alien Influences" shares a world with "Dancers Like Children" which appeared in our September 1991 issue. But the story takes place decades after the first. "Alien Influences" was originally written for Mike Resnick's* Whatdunnit *anthology, a collection of science fiction mysteries that will arrive on the stands next year.*

# Alien Influences

**By Kristine Kathryn Rusch**

I

THE CORRIDOR SMELLED stale. John huddled against the display panel, replacing microchips with the latest models — more memory, more function. The near-robotic feel of the work was all that mattered: pull, grab, replace; pull, grab, replace. They should have had a 'droid doing this, but they had given the work to John, sure sign that his contract was nearly up.

He didn't mind. He had been on the trader ship for nearly a month, and it was making him nervous. Too many people, too close. They watched him as if they expected him to go suddenly berserk and murder them all in their sleep. He wouldn't have minded if their wariness had been based on his work as a bounty hunter. But it wasn't. It was based on the events on

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Bountiful, things he had done — and paid for — when he was little more than a child.

Footsteps along the plastic floor. He didn't move, figuring whoever it was would have nothing to say to him. A faint whiff of cologne and expensive illegal tobacco. The captain.

"John, someone to see you."

John looked up. The captain stood on the other side of the corridor, the lights from the display giving his skin a greenish cast. Once, John had fancied this man his friend, but John hadn't had any real friends. Not since he was fifteen years old. The day Harper betrayed him. The day they took Beth away.

"I will not see anyone," John said. Sometimes he played the role, the Dancer child everyone thought he was. The one who never spoke in past tense, only present and future, using the subjunctive whenever possible. The one who couched his thoughts in emotion because he had nothing else, no memory, no ethics, no soul.

The captain didn't even blink. "She flew in special from Rotan Base."

John stood and closed the display. A client, then. The time on the trader ship would end sooner than he had expected.

He followed the captain through the winding corridors. The ventilation system was out. The entire ship smelled of wet socks and too many people. Down one of the corridors, the techs were discussing whether they wanted to fix the system or whether they wanted to wait until next planetfall. John would have argued for fixing it.

The captain stopped at his personal suite and keyed in the access code. John had never seen this room; it was off-limits to all but the captain himself. John stepped in, but the captain remained outside. The door snicked shut.

Computer-generated music — technically proficient and lifeless — played in the background. The room itself was decorated in whites, but the lighting gave everything a reddish cast. The couch was thick and plush. Through open doors, he could see the bed, suspended in the air, cushions piled on top of it. A room built for comfort, and for seduction.

A woman stood at the back of the room, gazing out the portals at the stars. Her long black hair trailed down her back, her body wrapped in expensive silks. She looked the part of the seductee, although she was the one who wanted to hire him.

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John never hired out for anything but bounty work. He would tell her that if he had to.

"I would like you to work for me, John." She didn't even turn around to acknowledge him. He felt his hackles rise. She was establishing herself as the adult, him the child in this relationship. He hated being treated like a child. The claustrophobia inched back on him, tighter than it had been in months.

He leaned against the door, feigning a casualness he didn't feel. He wanted her to turn around, to look at him. "Why should I work for you?"

"Forgive me." This time she moved, smoothing her hair as she did. Her face was stunning: full lips, long nose, wide eyes. And familiar. "I'm Anita Miles. I run an art gallery on Rotan Base. We specialize in unusual objects d'art. . . ."

He stopped listening, not needing the explanation. He recognized her face from a hundred vids. She was perhaps one of the most powerful people in this sector — controlling trade and commodities. Her gallery sold anything that could be considered art. Once, she sold a baby Minaran, claiming that since the species was nearly extinct, the Minarans could be appreciated only in an aesthetic way. He couldn't remember if she had won or lost the ensuing lawsuit.

Baby trader. The entire galaxy as an art object. If she had been in business when he was a boy, what would she have done with the Dancers?

"Why should I work for you?" he repeated.

She closed her mouth and gave him a once-over. He recognized the look. *How much does he understand? I thought I was explaining in clear terms. This is going to be more difficult than I thought.* "You're the best," she said, apparently deciding on simplicity. "And I need the best."

He often wondered how these people thought he could bounty hunt with no memory. He shook off the thought. He needed the money. "What will you pay me?"

"Expenses, of course, a ship at your command because you may have to travel a bit, and three times your daily rate — which is, I believe, the equivalent of four hundred Rotan zepeatas."

"Eight hundred."

Her expression froze for just a moment, and then she had the grace to flush. John crossed his arms. Too many clients tried to cheat him. He took them on anyway. If he tried to avoid those who treated him like a Dancer, he would have no business.

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"I'm not a Dancer." He kept his tone soft, but made sure the sarcasm was there. "I wasn't even raised by them. Just influenced. The trial is over, and I've served my time. When they released me, they declared me sane, and sane for a human being means an understanding of time and an ability to remember. After that little stunt, I won't work with you for anything less than five times my rate, one month payable in advance."

The flush grew, making those spectacular eyes shine brighter. Not embarrassment after all. Anger. "You tricked me."

"Not at all." John didn't move. He felt more comfortable now with this little hint of emotion. He could ride on emotion, play it. That he had learned from the Dancers. "You had expectations. You shouldn't believe everything you hear."

For a moment, she drew herself up, as if she were going to renounce him and leave. But she didn't. She reached into her pocket and removed a credit flask. She must have needed him badly.

She handed him two chips, which he immediately put into his account. One hundred and twenty thousand zepeatas. Perfect. He smiled for the first time. "What do you want from me?" he asked.

She glanced at the portals, as if the stars would give her strength. The story was an embarrassment, then. An illegality perhaps or some mistake she had made. "Several weeks ago," she said, "I acquired a Bodean wind sculpture."

Awe rippled through him. He had seen Bodean wind sculptures once, on their home planet. The deserts were full of them, swirling beautifully across the sands. No one knew how to tame them; they remained an isolated art form, on a lone planet. Someone must have figured out a way to capture them, wind currents and all.

"That's not the best part," she said. Her tone had changed. She still wasn't treating him like an equal, but she was closer. "The best part is the mystery inside the sculpture. My equipment indicates a life-form trapped in there."

*No, no. Not allowed to leave the room, the wing. — If we grow up, we'll be able to leave, never see Bountiful again. If we grow up. . . .*

He shook the memory voices away, made himself concentrate on her words. Something inside the sculpture. A bodeangenie? But they were the stuff of legends. Traders to Bodean claimed that the sculptures originated to capture little magical beings to prevent them from causing harm to the

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desert. When the Extra-Species Alliance went to study the sculptures, however, they found no evidence of life in or around them.

His hands were shaking. She trapped things and called them art. "You don't need me," he said. "You need a specialist."

"I need you." She turned, her hair spiraling out around her. Beautiful, dramatic. "The wind sculpture's been stolen."

II

SLEEP. NARROW trader bunk, not built for his long frame. Dream voices, half-remembered:

*. . . we'll be able to leave . . .*

*. . . the Dancers do it . . .*

*. . . It'll hurt, but that won't matter. You'll grow up . . .*

*. . . Stop, please . . .*

*. . . Just another minute . . .*

*. . . Stop!!! . . .*

*. . . the other hand . . .*

*. . . ssstttoooooppp. . . .*

He forced himself awake, heart pounding, mouth dry. The trapped feeling still filled him. He rolled off the bunk, stood, listened to the even breathing of the other sleepers. He hadn't had the dream since when? The penal colony? The last trading ship? He couldn't remember. He had tried to put it out of his mind. Obviously that hadn't worked.

Trapped. He had started the spiral when she said the word *trapped.* He leaned against the door, felt the cool plastic against his forehead. The memory voices still rang in his head. If someone had listened, then maybe. . . .

But no. The past was past. He would work for her, but he would follow his own reasons.

III

HER GALLERY was less than he had expected. Shoved into a small corner of the merchant's wing of Rotan Base, the gallery had a storefront of only a few meters. Inside hung the standard work by standard artists: an Ashley rendition of the galaxy,

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done in blacks and pinks; a D.B. portrait of the sphynix, a red-haired catlike creature from Yster; a Dugas statue of a young girl dancing. Nothing new, nothing unique, not even in the manner of display. All the pieces were self-illuminated against dark walls and stands, a small red light beside each indicating the place for credit purchases.

The gallery was even more of a surprise after she had told him her tale of woe: she claimed to have the best guards on Rotan, an elaborate security system, and special checking. He saw no evidence of them. Her storefront was the same as the others, complete with mesh framing that cascaded at closing each evening.

The gallery smelled dry, dustless. He wanted to sneeze, just to see particles in the air. The air's cleanliness, at least, was unusual. He would have to check the filtration system. The sculpture probably hadn't disappeared at all. Some overeager viewer probably opened the container, the wind escaped, and the sculpture returned to the grains of sand it was. No great mystery, certainly not worth 120,000 zepeatas. But he wouldn't tell her that.

Anita threaded her way through the displays to the back. He felt himself relax. There he would find the artwork he sought — the priceless, the illegal, the works that had made her famous. But when the door slid open, his mood vanished.

Crates, cartons, holoshippers, transmission machines, more credit slots. The faint odor of food. A desk covered with hard-copy invoices and credit records. A small cache of wine behind the overstuffed chair, and a microprocessor for late-night meals. A work space, nothing more.

She let the door close behind them, her gaze measuring him. He was missing something. He would lose the entire commission if he didn't find it.

He closed his eyes and saw in his imagination what his actual vision had missed. The dimensions of the rooms were off. The front was twice the size of the back. Base regulations required square sales — each purchased compartment had to form a box equal on all sides. She had divided her box into three sections — showroom, back workroom, and special gallery. But where?

Where something didn't fit. The wine. She sold wine as art — nectar of the gods, never drinking it, always collecting it. Wine didn't belong with the boxes and invoices.

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He opened his eyes, crouched down, scanned the wine rack. Most bottles came from Earth. They were made with the heavy, too-thick glass that suggested work centuries old. Only one didn't belong: a thin bottle of the base-made synth stuff. He pulled it, felt something small fall into his hand. He clenched his hand to hold it as the wall slid back.

Inside was the gallery he had been expecting.

Holos of previous artifacts danced across the back wall. In those holos the baby Minaran swam. He wondered where it was now; if it could feel happiness, exploitation. He made himself look away.

A tiny helldog from Frizos clawed at a glass cage. A mobile ice sculpture from Ngela rotated under cool lights. Four canisters in a bowl indicated a Colleician scent painting. He had seen only one before; all he had to do was touch it, and he would be bathed in alien memories.

More valuables drifted off in the distance. Some hung on walls, some rested on pedestals, and some floated around him. None had the standard red credit slot beside them. They were all set up for negotiation, bargaining, and extortion.

"Impressed?" She sounded sarcastic, as if a man with his background could not help but be impressed.

He was, but not for the reasons she thought. He knew how much skill it took to capture each item, to bring it onto a base with strict limitations for importing. "You have your own hunters. Why hire me?"

She tapped on the helldog's cage. John winced. The dog didn't move. "I would have had to hire a hunter no matter what," she said. "If I removed one of my own people from a normal routine, I would have to hire a replacement. I choose not to do that. My people have their own lives, their own beats, and their own predilections. This incident calls for someone a bit more adaptable, a free-lancer. A person like you."

He nodded, deciding that was the best answer he would get from her. Perhaps she had chosen him, and not one of his colleagues, on a whim. Or perhaps she thought she could control him, with his Dancer mind. It didn't matter. She was paying him. And he had a being to free.

## IV

Working late into the night so that the dreams would stay away, he did the standard checks: exploring the gallery for bits of the sculpture, con-

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tacting the base engineers to see if sand had lodged in the filters, examining particulate material for foreign readings. Nothing. The sculpture appeared to have vanished.

Except for the small item he had found near the wine cache. He set it in the light, examined it, and froze. A sticker. Lina Base used them as temporary I.D.s. Stickers weren't the proper term. Actually, they were little light tabs that allowed the bearer to enter secured areas for brief periods of time, and were called stickers because most spacers stuck them to the tops of their boots.

He hadn't touched one since he had left Lina Base nearly two decades before. The memories tickled around his head: Beth, her eyes wide, hands grasping, as Harper's people carried her away; sitting on his own bed, arms wrapped around his head, eyes burning but tearless, staring at his own sticker-covered boots — signifying temporary, even though he had been there for nearly two years.

Dancer mind. He snorted. If only he could forget. He was cursed with too much remembrance.

He set the sticker down, made himself move. He had to check arrival records, see who had come from Lina Base, who frequented it. Then he would know who had taken the sculpture.

## V

THE NEXT morning he walked into the gallery. The showroom was filled with Elegian tourists, fondling the merchandise. The security system had to be elaborate to allow such touching without any obvious watchful presence. The room smelled of animal sweat and damp fur. No wonder her filtration system was good. He pushed his way through and let himself into the back.

Anita was cataloging chip-sized gems that had arrived the day before. She wore a jeweler's eye and didn't look up when he entered.

"I need that ship," he said.

"You found something?"

He nodded. "A lead. Some traders."

This time she did look up. The jeweler's eye gave her face a foreign feel. "Who?"

A small ship out of Lina Base named *Runner*. Owned by a man named

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Minx. He worked with four others on odd jobs no one else wanted — domestic cats from Earth to a colony of miners on Cadmium; a cargo of worthless Moon rocks to scientists on Mina Base. No records older than twenty years. No recording of illegal trading of any kind. But he didn't tell her that. He still wasn't sure if he was going to tell her anything.

"No one you'd know," he said. "If it turns out to be them, I'll introduce you."

She removed the jeweler's eye. Her own looked less threatening. "You're working for me, which gives me the right to know what you've found."

"You *contracted* with me," he corrected. "And I have the right to walk away anytime I choose — keeping the retainer. Now. Do I get that ship?"

She stared at him for a minute, then put the eye back in. "I'll call down," she said.

## VI

THE SHIP was nearly a decade old, and designed to carry fewer than five people in comfort. He had computer access, games and holos, as much food and drink as he wanted. Only rules were not to disturb the pilot — for any reason. He guessed she had found out about his past, and wanted nothing to do with him.

He slept most of the time. His way of escape on ships. When he was awake, they reminded him of the penal ship, of the hands grabbing, voices prodding, violence, stink, and finally isolation, ostensibly for his own good. When he was asleep, they were the only places that allowed him rest without dreams.

His alarm went off an hour before landing, and he paced. He hadn't been to Lina Base for twenty years. He had left as a boy, alone, without Beth, without even Harper, the man who had once been his savior and became his betrayer. Harper, who had healed his mind, and broken his heart.

When the ship landed, John didn't move. He was crazy to go back, crazy to look at the past he had been avoiding. No job was worth that, especially a job he only half-believed in.

*You have to face your past, face yourself. And once you see clearly what happened and why, you must forgive yourself. Only then will you be whole.*

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Harper's voice. John shook himself, as if he could force the voice from his head. He had promised himself, when he left Lina Base on the penal ship, that he would never listen to Harper again.

He had a job. His stay on Lina Base would be short.

He drew himself to his full height and let himself out of his room. The pilot was at the door. She stopped moving when she saw him, her gaze wary. He nodded. She nodded back. Then he went out of the ship before her.

The docking bay had shiny new walls and state-of-the-art flooring. But it smelled the same: dusty, tangy, harsh with chemical cleaners. He gripped the railing, cool against his hand.

*. . . cringing in the back of the ship, safe behind the upholstered chairs. Voices urging him to get off, and he knowing they were going to kill him. They believed he had done something wrong, and he was going to get a punishment worse than any his parents could dish out. . . .*

"You O.K.?" the pilot asked.

He snapped back to the present. He was not twelve, not landing on Lina Base for the first time. He was an adult, a man who could handle himself.

Down the stairs and into the base. No crowds this time, no holoteams, no reporters. No Harper, no savior, no friends beside him. Only ships and shuttles of various sizes. Lina Base had grown since the last time he had been there. Now it had three docking facilities instead of one. It was one of the main trading bases in the galaxy, and had grown instead of declined when the officials had closed Bountiful to any and all aliens. He stopped, remembered: If he went to one of the portals, he would be able to see Bountiful, its deserts and mountains etched across the surface like a painting, the Singing Sea adding a touch of blue to the art.

Odd that he missed the place when, as a boy, all he had wanted to do was leave it.

"You seriously O.K.?"

"Yes." He whirled, expecting his anger to deflate her concern. Then understood that she was speaking from obligation. He was her charge until he left the docking bay, and she didn't want the responsibility of handling him.

"Then get to deck three for inspection and hosing. They need to clean this bay for other arrivals."

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He nodded, felt a bit numb at her lack of concern. Procedures. After an outbreak of Malanian flu almost three decades before, Lina Base had become fanatic for keeping unwanted elements off the station. During his first visit here, he had been quarantined for three Earth months.

He turned his back on the pilot, sought the elevator, and took it to a tiny corridor on deck three. There a blinking light indicated the room he was to use. He went inside.

The room was better than the one they had given him as a child. This one had a couch, and a servo tray filled with beverages. He stripped, let the robot arms whisk away his clothes, and then stepped under the pale blue light in the corner of the room.

Streams of light invaded his orifices, tickling with the warmth of their touch. He closed his eyes, holding himself still, knowing that, on some bases, they still used hand searches, and wondering how he could ever stand that when he found this procedure so invasive. When the light had finished, he stepped into the autodoc and let it search him for viruses, traces of alien matter, alien materials, and — probably — alien thought.

Alien influences. . . .

A shiver ran through him. He had been twelve years old. Twelve years old and not realizing that what they had done was abnormal. Not human. Yet he was still human enough to feel terror at separation from all that he knew. Knowing, deep down, that the horror was only beginning.

The autodoc was beeping, and, for a long moment, he was afraid it had found something. Then he realized that it wanted him to leave its little chamber. He stepped back into the main room and retrieved his clothes —now cleaned and purified — dressed, and pressed the map to find out where he was and where he wanted to be.

## VII

JOHN HUDDLED in the shuttle records bay. Dark, cramped, smelling of sweat and skin oils, it was as familiar as any other place on the base. Only, this was a different kind of familiarity. Every base had a records bay. And every base had an operator like Donnie.

He was small, wiry, scrawny enough to be comfortable in such a small place. His own stink didn't bother him — he was used to being alone. He monitored the traffic to and from the base, maintained licenses, and refus-

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ed admittance if necessary.

"Left just as you were docking," he said. His lips barely parted, but his teeth were visible — half fake white, half rotted. "In a hurry, too. Gave 'em the day's last slot."

The day's last slot. No other craft could be cleared for leaving, then, until the next day. John clenched his fists. So close.

"Where did they go?"

Donnie checked the hard copy, then punched a button. The display on the screen was almost unreadable. He punched another button, lower lip out, grimy fingers shaking.

"Got a valid pass," he mumbled.

The shiver again, something a bit off. "Where?" John asked.

"Bountiful."

The word shimmered through him. Heat, thin and dry; deep, flowery perfume; the rubbery feel of Dancer fingers. . . .

"You done?" Donnie asked.

John took a deep breath, calmed himself. "You need to get me to Bountiful."

"Nope." Donnie leaned back in the chair. "I know who you are. Even if Bountiful were open, I couldn't let you go there."

Trapped. This time outside Bountiful. John's fingernails dug into his palms. The pain kept him awake, sane. He made his voice sound calmer than he felt. "Where do I get the dispensation?"

Donnie gazed at him, scared of nothing, so secure in his small world of records, passes. "Level five. But they won't help —"

"They will," John said.

## VIII

HE PUT IN a call to Anita, told her to hurry, or she would never get her sculpture back. She would pull the strings and dole out the cash. He would spend his time digging out information about the traders.

Lina Base's paranoia about its traders led to a wealth of information. He spent half an Earth day alone with a small computer linked up to the base's mainframe.

And found the information he had already known, plus some. Lina Base

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was their main base of operation. They were well known, not popular. Two men worked with Minx: Dunnigan, trained as a linguist; and Carter, no formal training at all. The women, Parena and Nox, provided muscle and contacts. They had gotten the jobs on Calmium and Mina Base. And they had all hooked up twenty years ago.

After Bountiful had been closed to aliens.

When Minx had to expand his operation.

When Salt Juice had become illegal.

Salt Juice. That little piece of information sent ripples of fear through John. Food. He had to get food. Take care of himself. He stood, unable to stop his mind.

Salt Juice had started it all.

The very smell of it gave him tremors, made him revert, close all the doors on himself, close out the memories and the emotions and the pain. He would focus on the future for protection, Dancer-like, and no one —except Harper, base kiddie therapist — had been able to get in. The only way to keep himself intact, human, was to take care of his body so that the damaged part of his mind could recover.

He went to the cafeteria.

Wide, spacious, with long windows open to space, and hanging plants from all sides, the cafeteria gave him a feeling of safety. He ordered off the servo, picked his table, and ran the credit voucher through. His food appeared on the table almost before the voucher stopped running. He walked over, sat down, and sniffed.

Roast chicken, steamed broccoli, mashed potatoes. Not a normal spacer's meal. Heaven. He made himself eat, feeling the food warm the cold places inside him. As he nourished himself, he allowed his mind to roam.

Salt Juice had been one of the most potent intoxicants in the galaxy. It was manufactured on Bountiful, using herbs grown by the Dancers. The main reason for the dispute with the Dancers was those herbs — and when the colony finally learned how to grow them without Dancer assistance, they tried to wipe out the Dancers.

With the help of children. Poor misguided children. Lonely little children who wanted only to leave the hell they were trapped in.

Once Lina Base discovered the scheme, Bountiful was closed. The best herbalists and chemists tried to manufacture Salt Juice away from the colony, but it proved impossible. A good thing. Later they learned that the

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drug everyone thought addiction-free had some nasty side effects.

Minx traded in Salt Juice.

Then Moon rocks, cats. Worthless cargo. But Calmium's northern water supply had a drug as pure as crystal meth. And the Minaran skin was poison that, taken in small amounts, induced a dangerous kind of high.

The five were drug runners. Good, competent, skilled drug runners.

So the bodeangenie had more than artistic value to them. It also had some kind of stimulant value. He leaned back. What kind, he was sure he would find out.

## IX

BUT THINGS happened too quickly. The call came from Anita. She had bought him a window — three Earth days — and she let him know that it had cost her a fortune. He smiled. He was glad to put her money to good use.

He located the pilot, and together they flew to the place from which he had been banned for life.

## X

ONCE AGAIN he sat in his room on the ship, far from the uncommunicative pilot. He was glad for the solitude, even on such a short trip. He hadn't been to Bountiful since he was twelve. Then he had hated the planet, wanted nothing more than to be free of it. But the freedom he obtained wasn't the freedom he had expected.

*. . . The plastic frame dug into his forehead. Through the portal, he could see Bountiful, swirling away from him. They had isolated him, considering him the ringleader — and perhaps he was. He hadn't understood the depths of their anger. He was experimenting, as they had; only, he was trying to save the others. . . .*

He sighed and walked to the portal. Bountiful loomed, dark and empty. Only five humans on the planet. Five humans and hundreds of Dancers, thousands of other species. After the announcement of the murders, the authorities had declared the planet unsafe and had closed it to all colonization. Even researchers needed special dispensation to go. The Dancers were too powerful, their thought too destructive. He shook his head. But

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the Dancers hadn't been the real problem. Salt Juice had.

Without Salt Juice, the Dancers would never have become an endangered species. Without Salt Juice, the colony wouldn't have made money, and wouldn't have tried to protect that base by allowing ill-conceived killings to go on. The colonists had tried to blame the Dancers for the murders to exterminate the entire species; the intergalactic shock had been great when investigators discovered that the murderers were children.

Salt Juice. He still remembered the fumes, the glazed looks in his parents' eyes. Colonists weren't supposed to indulge — and none did —but they all suffered from Salt Juice intoxication because of their exposure during manufacturing. Perhaps if he had had a better lawyer, if the effects of Salt Juice had been better understood at the time, he would have gotten off, been put in rehabilitation instead of incarceration.

A slight ponging warned him that the shuttle would land soon. He dug in his duffel and removed the sand scarf and some ointment. The woven material felt familiar, warm, a touch of the past. As children, they had stopped wearing sand scarves, and he had gotten so crisped by Bountiful's sun that he still had tan lines. He was older now, and wiser. He would wear the offered protection.

His throat had gone dry. Three days alone on Bountiful. The pilot wouldn't stay — probably due to fear of him. John strapped himself in, knowing it was too late to turn back.

The shuttle bumped and scuttled its way to a stop. Already the temperature inside had changed from cool to the kind of almost-cool developed when the outside air was extremely hot. John unstrapped himself, put on the sand scarf, and rubbed oil over his exposed skin. Then he slung the duffel over his back and got up and went into the flight deck.

The pilot made an exasperated, fearful noise. John ignored her. Through the windows, he could see the salt cliffs and the Singing Sea. The shuttle landed where they had always landed, on the edge of the desert, half a day's walk from the colony itself. He realized with a shudder that no one lived on the planet but the natives. The five traders and the sand sculpture were the aliens here.

He had no plan. He had been too lost in his memories.

"Familiar?" the pilot asked. Her expression was wary. She knew his history. Perhaps she thought that once he set foot on the planet, he would

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pull out a Dancer ritual knife and slice off her hands and feet.

He didn't answer her. "You're coming back in three days?"

She nodded. Her hands were shaking on the controls. What kind of lies had the authorities made up about Bountiful to keep the curious away? That one touch of the desert sand would lead to madness? That one view of the Dancers would lead to murder?

"Wait for me. Even if I'm not here right away, I'll be coming." The words sounded hollow to his own ears. She nodded again, but he knew at that moment that she wouldn't wait. He would have to be here precisely on time or be stranded on Bountiful forever. Trapped.

The child inside him shivered.

He tugged on the duffel strap, adjusting it, and let himself out. A hot, dry breeze caressed his face. The air smelled like flowers, decaying flowers too long in the sun. Twelve years of memories, familiarity, and fear rose within him — and suddenly he didn't want to be here anymore. He turned to the shuttle, but the bay door had already closed. He reached up to flag her down — and turned the gesture into a wave. He was not twelve anymore. The adults were gone. The colony was gone. He was the adult now, and he wouldn't let himself down.

## XI

THE TRADERS had made a brilliant decision to come to Bountiful with the wind sculpture. Here they had a ready-made empty colony, a desert filled with sand, and winds aplenty. They could experiment until they were able to duplicate whatever effect they needed, or they could use the planet as a base from which to travel back to Bodean. No one would have caught on if Anita hadn't started the search for her sculpture.

The colony's dome shone like a glass in the sunlight. The walk wasn't as long as John remembered. Still, he would have loved an air car. Air cars had always been forbidden here; they destroyed the desert's delicate ecological balance.

He stopped in front of the dome, stunned to see it covered with little sand particles. In another generation the dome would be a mound of sand, with no indication that anything had ever existed beneath it. The desert reclaimed its own.

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He brushed the sand aside, feeling the grains cling to the oil on his skin. The dome was hot, hotter than he cared to touch, but still he felt for the fingerholds that he knew would be there.

And found them. Smaller than he remembered, and filled with sand, but there. He tugged, and, with a groan, the section moved. He slipped inside, bumping his head on the surface. He was a man now, not a boy, and crawling through small spaces wasn't as easy as it used to be.

Once inside, he closed the hatch and took a deep breath. The air wasn't stale as he had expected it to be. It tasted metallic, dusty, like air from a machine that had been turned off for a long time. Decades, probably.

The traders had been in here. Of course they would know that the dome could be breached from the outside. Bountiful's colonists had had a terror of being trapped in the desert.

All he had to do was go to the municipal building, and track them from there. So easy. They would have to wait three lousy Earth days together for the shuttle pilot to return.

He turned onto a street and started walking. He had made it halfway down the block, before the things he saw registered and his emotions stopped him.

The houses hadn't collapsed. They were old-time regulation colony homes, built for short term, but used on Bountiful for nearly a century. The lawns were dead. Brown hulks of plants remained, crumbling now that the air had come back on.

The lawns, the gardens, had been the colonists' joy. They were so pleased that they had been able to tame this little space of land, turn it into their ideal of Earth. Plastic homes with no windows, and Earth flowers everywhere. The dome used to change color with the quality of the light: sometimes gray, sometimes blue, sometimes an odd sepia to protect the colonists from the UV rays.

All of that gone now. No voices, no hum of the Salt Juice factory, no movement. Just John on a long, empty street, facing long, empty ghosts.

There, on the house to the left, he and the other children had placed Michael Dengler's body. He had been the last one, the true failure. It had seemed so logical that if they removed his head along with his hands, his heart, and his lungs, he would grow taller and stronger than the adults. But like the others, he didn't grow at all.

John sunk to the ground, wrapped his arms around his head as if he

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could shield himself from his own memories. He and the others weren't covered under the Alien Influences Act. They weren't crazy. They were, according to the prosecuting attorney, evil children with an evil plan.

All they had wanted to do was escape. And they thought the Dancers held the secret to that escape.

He remembered huddling behind the canopied trees, watching the Dancer puberty ritual, thinking it made so much sense: remove the hands, the heart, and the lungs so that the new ones would grow in. He was on a different planet now, the third generation born in a new place. Of course, he wasn't growing up. He wasn't following the traditions of the new world.

The attorneys asked him, over and over: if he believed that, why hadn't he gone first? He had wanted to go last, thinking that to be the ultimate sacrifice. Dancer children didn't move for days. He didn't understand the adult reaction — the children weren't dead; they were growing new limbs. Or at least, that was what he had thought. Until Michael Dengler. Then John understood what he had done.

He stayed on his knees for a long time. Then he made himself rise slowly. He did bounty now. He traveled all over the galaxy. He had served his sentence. This was done, gone. He had a wind sculpture to recover, and the people were within his grasp.

He made himself walk, and concentrate on the future.

## XII

HE FOUND where they had gotten in. Another section had been dislodged, letting too-bright sunlight into the dome. Footprints marred the dirt, and several brown plant stalks were newly broken. Being this close usually excited him — one of the few excitements that he had — but this time he felt empty inside.

His breathing rasped in his throat. He had a dual feeling; that of being watched and that of being totally alone. The hairs prickled on the back of his neck. Something was wrong here.

He followed the footprints to the municipal building. The door was open — an invitation almost. He couldn't go around to the windows, since there were none, and most buildings didn't have another doorway. He braced himself, and slipped in.

The silence was heavier in here. The buildings always had a bit of

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white noise — the rustle of a fan, the whisper of air filtering through the ceiling. Here nothing. Perhaps they had found the controls only for the dome itself. Perhaps they wanted it quiet so that they could hear him.

The walls and floors were spotless, so clean that they looked as if they had been washed days before. Only the dirt-covered tracks of the traders marred the whiteness, a trail leading him forward, like an Earth dog on the trail of a scent.

He followed it, willing to play out his little role in this drama. Some action would take his mind off the remains of the colony, of the hollow vestiges of his past.

He rounded the corner — and found the first body.

It leaned against the wall, skin toughened, mummified into a near skeleton. For a minute, he thought it had been there since the colony closed, and the air shut down, then he noticed the weapon in its left hand. A small hand-held laser, keyed to a person's print. Last year's model.

He made himself swallow and lean in. One of the traders. For a minute, he couldn't determine which one. He ripped at the clothes, discovered gender — male — then studied the wrinkled, freeze-dried face.

Not the old trader, Minx, who had run Salt Juice. One of the younger males. Tension crept up his back. He held himself still. He had seen this kind of death before, but where?

The answer required that he let down some internal shields, reach into his own memory. He did so slowly, feeling the hot spots, the oppression the colony imposed on him. Then it came:

A Cadmium miner on one of the many cargo ships he had worked for. The miner had slipped into the hold, trying to get safe passage somewhere, not realizing that to get out of those mines, he needed a series of shots, shots that protected him from the ways that the mining had destroyed his body, processes that wouldn't start until the mining ended.

The captain of the cargo ship had leaned over to John, expressing the view for the entire ship. "God," he had said. "I hope I don't die like that."

John touched the corpse again, figuring that if he was contaminated, there wasn't much he could do about it. Amazing that he hadn't died when he left Cadmium. They had been away from that planet for years. Amazing that the death would come now, here, in this faraway place, with a weapon in his hand.

He took the laser from the body, ran the diagnostic. It worked. He pock-

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eted the laser. Better to use that weapon than his own. Cover his tracks, if he had to.

The footprint path continued down the hall. He brushed off his hands and followed it. All the doors were closed, locks blinking, as if they hadn't been touched since the colony had been evacuated.

He followed the trail around another corner, and found another body: this one a woman. She was sprawled across the floor, clothing shredded, blood everywhere, eyes wide with terror. No desiccation, no mummification. This time the reek of death and the lingering scent of fear.

She appeared to have been brutalized and beaten to death, but as he got closer, he realized that she didn't have a scratch on her. John's throat had gone dry, and his hands were shaking. He had never before encountered anything as odd as this. How did people die on a dead planet? Nothing here would do this, not in this fashion, and not so quickly. He knew about death on Bountiful, and it didn't work like this.

He pulled the laser out of his pocket and kept going. The dirt path didn't look like footprints anymore, just a swirl of dirt along a once-clean floor. He half-expected a crazed trader to leap out from behind one of the doors, but he knew that wouldn't happen. The deaths were too bizarre, too different to be the work of a maniac. They had been planned. And a little scared voice inside told him they had been planned for him.

## XIII

JOHN REACHED the main control room, surprised to find it empty and silent. Lights blinked and flashed on a grid panel nearly two centuries old. He checked the patterns, using guesswork, experience with odd grids, and a half-worn-down diagram near the top of the room to figure out how it should run. His instincts warned him to absorb the knowledge in this room — and absorbing it he was, as quickly as he could.

A door slammed somewhere in the building.

His skin prickled. He whirled. No one visible. No sounds. Nothing except the slight breeze caused by his own actions. He moved slowly, with a deliberation he didn't feel. He checked the corridor, both directions, noting that it was empty. Then he left the main control room. There was nothing more he could do inside. He walked toward the direction of the

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slammed door. Someone else was alive in here, and he would find that person. He didn't know what he would do then.

His heart was pounding against his chest. Death had never frightened him before. He had never felt it as a threat, only as a partner, an accident. He never saw the murders as deaths, just failed experiments. No one he loved had ever died. They had just disappeared.

Another body littered the corridor. He didn't examine it. A quick glance told him the cause of death. Parts were scattered all over, hanging in the ritual position of Fetin killings, something he had seen too much of in his own exile.

The fourth body was crucified against a wall, upside down, blood still dripping onto the pristine floor. Perhaps he was wrong. One madman with a lot of determination, and perhaps some kind of toxic brain poisoning from a drug he wasn't used to. One man, Minx, the old trader, under the influence of the Bodean wind sculpture.

He hated to think Minx had done this in a rational frame of mind.

John had circled nearly the entire building. From his position, he could see the door, still standing open. Minx had to be outside, waiting for him. He tensed, holding the laser, setting his own systems on alert.

The dirt spread all over the floor, and a bit on the walls. Odd, without anyone tracking it. Was Minx's entire body grimy? John crept along as quietly as he could, trying to disturb nothing. Seemed eerie, as if Minx had been planning for this. It felt as if he had been watching, waiting, as if John were part of a plan. Even eerier that Minx had managed to kill so many people in such diverse ways — and in such a short period of time.

It made no sense.

John reached the front door — and went rigid, except for a trembling at the very base of his spine. Minx was there, all right; waiting, all right —but not in the way John had expected.

Minx was dead.

The blood still trickled from the stumps where his hands used to be. His chest was flayed open, heart and lungs missing. Head tilted back, neck half-cut, as if whoever had done this couldn't decide whether or not to slice it through.

He hadn't been there when John had gone into the building. Minx couldn't have died here — it took too long to chop up a human being like that. John knew. He had done it half a dozen times — with willing victims. Minx didn't look willing.

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The blood was everywhere, spraying everything. Minx had to have died while John was inside.

To kill an adult the size of Minx would have taken a lot of strength, or a lot of time.

The shivering ran up John's spine, into his hands. *I didn't mean to kill him!* the little boy inside him cried. *We just wanted to grow up, like Dancers. Please. I didn't mean. . . .*

He quashed the voice. He had to think. All five were dead. Something —

"John?"

He looked up. Beth stood before him, clutching a Dancer ritual blade. It was blood-covered, and so was she. Streaks had splattered across her face, her hands. He hadn't seen her since she was fifteen, since the afternoon the authorities caught them comforting each other, him inside her, her legs wrapped around him like a hug.

The first and last time John had been intimate with anyone.

She had hated the killings, had never wanted to do them. Always sat quietly when Harper made the group talk about them. Three years of sessions, one afternoon of love. Then prison ship and separation, and him bounty hunting, alone, forever.

"Beth?" He knew it wasn't her, couldn't be her. She would never do anything like this, not alone, and not now, so many years in the future. He walked toward her anyway, wanting to wipe the blood off her precious face. He reached for her, hand shaking, to touch that still-rosy cheek, to see if it was as soft as he remembered, when his hand went through her.

She was as solid as wind.

Wind.

She laughed and grew bigger, Minx now, even though he remained dead at John's feet. "Took you long enough," the bodeangenie said. "And you call yourself the best."

John glanced at the body, the ritual knife, found the laser in his own hand. A laser could not cut through wind.

"No," the bodeangenie said. "It can't."

John stopped breathing. He took a step back as the realization hit. The bodeangenie was telepathic. It had been inside John's head, inside his mind. He shuddered, wiped himself off, as if, in brushing away the sand, he brushed away the touch, the intimacy that he had never wanted. Had the others died of things they feared? That would explain the lack of external

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marks, the suddenness. That would explain all except Minx. Minx, who had died of something John feared.

Then the images assaulted him: the trader ship, full of sweat, laughter, and drink, hurtling toward the planet; the traders themselves, dipping into the bodeangenie like forbidden fruit, using him to enhance their own powers, tap each other's mind, playing; the Dancers, stalking out of the woods, into the desert; John, sitting in the cafeteria, his memories displayed before him; Anita, counting credits, peering into the bottle; the trap closing tight, holding him fast, a bit of wind, a bit of sand, a bit of plastic. . . .

John was the bodeangenie's freedom if Bountiful didn't work. He could pilot the traders' ship back to Bodean, back to the 'genie's home. Fear pounded inside his skull. He didn't want to die like that. He had never wanted to die like that. . . .

He slid to his knees, hands around his head as if to protect it. Harper's voice: *if you want protection, build a wall. Not a firm wall, a permeable one, to help you survive the alone times. The wall must come down when you need it to, so that things don't remain hidden. But sometimes, to protect yourself, build a wall.*

The sheets came up, slowly, but more easily than he had hoped because they were already half there. The bodeangenie chuckled, Beth again, laughter infectious. She went to the dome, touched it, and John saw Dancers, hundreds of them, their fingers rubbing against the plastic, their movements graceful and soft, the thing that had given them their name.

"Three choices," the bodeangenie said. "Me, or death, or them."

A little light went on behind his wall. The bodeangenie thought the Dancers frightened him. The 'genie could tap only what was on the surface, not what was buried deep, no matter what its threats.

Wind, and sand, and plastic.

John hurled himself at the dome, pushing out and sliding through. The Dancers vanished as if they had never been. He rolled in the sand, using all his strength to close the dome doors. The bodeangenie pushed against him with the power of wind. His muscles shook; his arms ached. The bodeangenie changed form, started to slip out, when John slammed the portal shut.

Trapping the 'genie inside.

The bodeangenie howled and raged against the plastic wall. The side

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of the dome shook, but the 'genie was trapped. A little boy appeared in his mind, alone in a foreign place, hands pounding on a door. *Let me out,* the little boy said with John's voice. *Please, I didn't mean to —*

His words, his past. Trapped. The 'genie was trapped. It had to be, or it would kill him. Trapped.

John started to run, as if that would drown out the voice. Across the sands toward the forest, toward something familiar. The sun beat down on him, and he realized he had forgotten his scarf, his ointment, his protection. The little boy kept pounding, sobbing. Torture. He wouldn't be able to survive it. Two more days until the shuttle arrived.

He could take the traders' ship, if he could find it.

The forest still looked charred, decades after the fire that had happened just before John had left the planet. But the canopied trees had grown back, and John could smell the familiar scent of tangy cinnamon. Dancers.

*No!!!* the little boy screamed in his head.

They came toward him, two-legged, two-armed, gliding like ballerinas on one of the bases. They chirruped in greeting, and he chirruped back, the language as fresh as if he had used it the day before.

His mind drifted into the future, into emotion, into their world.

*I would like to stay,* John said, placing his memories behind him. *I would like to be home.*

## XIV

SOMETIMES HE would wake in the middle of the night, stare through the canopies at the stars, and think: *Someday I will touch them.* Then he would return to sleep, incident forgotten.

Sometimes he would be touching a Dancer's hand, performing a ritual ceremony, and a child's scream would filter through his mind. He would drop the knife, plead apology, and wonder at it, since none of the others seemed to mind.

He loved the trees and the grass, but the hot, dry wind against his face would make him shiver. Sometimes he would think he was crazy, but usually he thought nothing at all.

* * *

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## XV

PERHAPS DAYS, perhaps months later, John found himself in the desert, searching for small plants. Food, he was thinking; he would like food — when fists, a little-boy voice, pounded their way into his mind. *Let me out; please let me out.* Puzzlement, a touch of fear, and something against a block —

The memories came flooding back, the shuttle, the bodeangenie. He sat down, examined his fried skin. Human. No matter how much he wanted to be Dancer, he would always be human, with memories, guilt, and regrets.

The bodeangenie was still trapped. The shuttle was long gone, and John was trapped here, presumed dead, doomed to die if he didn't get out of the harsh sun and eat human foods instead of Dancer foods.

He looked back into the forest. He had no memories of the past few days (months?). Dancer thought. Dancers had no memories. He had achieved it, ever so briefly. And it would kill him, just as it had nearly killed him when he had been a boy. They were his drug, as potent as Salt Juice, and as deadly.

*Please. . . .*

He stood, wiped himself off. The trader shuttle was hidden near the Singing Sea. The bodeangenie was trapped, the planet closed. He was thought dead, and Anita had lost her money.

Beth rose in his mind, pleading against the dome.

Beth. Her screams, his cries. Nights clutching a pillow pretending it was her, wanting the warmth she provided, the understanding of shared experience, shared terror.

Trapped.

The adults had punished him because he had felt trapped, abandoned, because he had killed to set himself free.

Like the bodeangenie.

John was the adult now.

He sank to the sand, examined his sunbaked skin. Much longer, and he would have died of exposure. He was already weak. His need to run, his longing for the Dancers, had trapped him as neatly as he had trapped the bodeangenie. He had been imprisoned so long that even when he had freedom, he imprisoned himself.

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Beth and a handful of children huddled near the edges of the dome, waiting for him. Children he had killed, others he had destroyed. The 'genie was using their memories to reach him, to remind him how it felt to be trapped.

He needed no reminding. He had never been free.

He got up, wiped the sand off his skin. His clothing was tattered, his feet callused. He had been hiding for a long time. The 'genie wasn't able to touch the Dancer part of his mind.

John started to walk, feet leading him away from the Dancers. He glanced back once, to the canopied forest, the life without thought, without memory. Alien influence. The reaction was not human.

And he was all too human.

*Please! I didn't mean. . . .*

Yes, he had. Just as the 'genie had. It was the only way they knew how to survive.

The sand burned under his bare feet. He wasn't too far from the dome. Perhaps that was how the 'genie's thoughts had penetrated. Saving him. Saving them both.

John nodded, a plan forming. He would take the 'genie back home on the trader ship, using Anita's credits for fuel. She would know that he was alive then, and she would be angry.

Then he would deal with her, and all the creatures she had trapped. He would find the Minaran, free it; free the little helldog. He would destroy her before she destroyed too much else.

Sand blew across the dome's surface. Almost buried, almost gone. He got closer, felt the presence inside.

*Please. . . .*

In his mind's eye, half a dozen children pushed their faces against the plastic, waiting for him. Beth, a woman now, held them in place. No 'genie. Just his past. Face it, Harper had said.

He had been running from it too long.

He reached the dome, brushed the sand away, searching for a portal.

The 'genie needed him. It wouldn't kill him. Wind couldn't pilot a spaceship alone.

"I'm coming," John said.

And inside the dome, the children rejoiced.

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# SCIENCE

## BRUCE STERLING

### BUCKYMANIA

CARBON, LIKE every other element on this planet, came to us from outer space. Carbon and its compounds are well-known in galactic gas-clouds, and in the atmosphere and core of stars, which burn helium to produce carbon. Carbon is the sixth element in the periodic table, and forms about two-tenths of one percent of Earth's crust. Earth's biosphere (most everything that grows, moves, breathes, photosynthesizes, or reads F&SF) is constructed mostly of waterlogged carbon, with a little nitrogen, phosphorus and such for leavening.

There are over a million known and catalogued compounds of carbon: the study of these compounds, and their profuse and intricate behavior, forms the major field of science known as organic chemistry.

Since prehistory, "pure" carbon has been known to humankind in three basic flavors. First, there's smut (lampblack or "amorphous carbon"). Then there's graphite: soft, grayish-black, shiny stuff — (pencil "lead" and lubricant). And third is that surpassing anomaly, "diamond," which comes in extremely hard translucent crystals.

Smut is carbon atoms that are poorly linked. Graphite is carbon atoms neatly linked in flat sheets. Diamond is carbon linked in strong, regular, three-dimensional lattices: tetrahedra, that form ultrasolid little carbon pyramids.

Today, however, humanity rejoices in possession of a fourth and historically unprecedented form of carbon. Researchers have created an entire class of these simon-pure carbon molecules, now collectively known as the "fullerenes." They were named in August 1985, in Houston, Texas, in honor of the American engineer, inventor, and delphically visionary philosopher, R. Buckminster Fuller.

"Buckminsterfullerene," or $C_{60}$, is the best-known fullerene. It's very round, the roundest molecule known to science. Sporting what is

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technically known as "truncated icosahedral structure," $C_{60}$ is the most symmetric molecule possible in three-dimensional Euclidean space. Each and every molecule of "Buckminsterfullerene" is a hollow, geodesic sphere of sixty carbon atoms, all identically linked in a spherical framework of twelve pentagons and twenty hexagons. This molecule looks exactly like a common soccerball, and was therefore nicknamed a "buckyball" by delighted chemists.

A free buckyball rotates merrily through space at one hundred million revolutions per second. It's just over one nanometer across. Buckminsterfullerene by the gross forms a solid crystal, is stable at room temperature, and is an attractive mustard-yellow color. A heap of crystalized buckyballs stack very much like pool balls, and are as soft as graphite. It's thought that buckyballs will make good lubricants — something like molecular ball bearings.

When compressed, crystallized buckyballs squash and flatten readily, down to about seventy percent of their volume. They then refuse to move any further and become extremely hard. Just *how* hard is not yet established, but according to chemical theory, compressed buckyballs may be considerably harder than diamond. They may make good shock absorbers, or good armor.

But this is only the beginning of carbon's multifarious oddities in the playful buckyball field. Because buckyballs are hollow, their carbon framework can be wrapped around other, entirely different atoms, forming neat molecular cages. This has already been successfully done with certain metals, creating the intriguing new class of "metallofullerites." Then there are buckyballs with a carbon or two knocked out of the framework and replaced with metal atoms. This "doping" process yields a galaxy of so-called "dopeyballs." Some of these dopeyballs show great promise as superconductors. Other altered buckyballs seem to be organic ferromagnets.

A thin film of buckyballs can double the frequency of laser light passing through it. Twisted or deformed buckyballs might act as optical switches for future fiber-optic networks. Buckyballs with dangling branches of nickel, palladium, or platinum may serve as new industrial catalysts.

The electrical properties of buckyballs and their associated compounds are very unusual, and therefore very promising. Pure $C_{60}$ is an insulator. Add three potassium atoms, and it becomes a low-temperature superconductor. Add three more potassium atoms, and it be-

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comes an insulator again! There's already excited talk in industry of making electrical batteries out of buckyballs.

Then there are the "buckybabies:" $C_{28}$, $C_{32}$, $C_{44}$, and $C_{52}$. The lumpy, angular buckybabies have received very little study to date, and heaven only knows what they're capable of, especially when doped, bleached, twisted, frozen or magnetized. And then there are the *big* buckyballs: $C_{240}$, $C_{540}$, $C_{960}$. Molecular models of these monster buckyballs look like giant chicken-wire beachballs.

There doesn't seem to be *any limit* to the upper size of a buckyball. If wrapped around one another for internal support, buckyballs can (at least theoretically) accrete like pearls. A truly titanic buckyball might be big enough to see with the naked eye. Conceivably, it might even be big enough to kick around on a playing field, if you didn't mind kicking an anomalous entity with unknown physical properties.

Carbon-fiber is a high-tech construction material which has been seeing a lot of use lately in tennis rackets, bicycles, and high-performance aircraft. It's already the strongest fiber known. This makes the discovery of "buckytubes" even more striking. A buckytube is carbon-fiber with a difference: it's a buckyball extruded into a long continuous cylinder comprised of one single superstrong molecule.

$C_{70}$, a buckyball cousin shaped like a rugby ball, seems to be useful in producing high-tech films of artificial diamond. Then there are "fuzzyballs" with sixty strands of hydrogen hair, "bunnyballs" with twin ears of butylpyridine, fluorinated "teflonballs" that may be the slipperiest molecules ever produced.

This sudden wealth of new high-tech slang indicates the potential riches of this new and multidisciplinary field of study, where physics, electronics, chemistry and materials-science are all overlapping, right now, in an exhilarating microsoccerball scrimmage.

Today there are more than fifty different teams of scientists investigating buckyballs and their relations, including industrial heavyhitters from AT&T, IBM and Exxon. *Science* magazine voted buckminsterfullerene "Molecule of the Year" in 1991. Buckyball papers have also appeared in *Nature*, *New Scientist*, *Scientific American*, even *Fortune* and *Business Week*. Buckyball breakthroughs are coming well-nigh every week, while the fax machines sizzle in labs around the world. Buckyballs are strange, elegant, beautiful, very intellectually sexy, and will soon be commercially hot.

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In chemical terms, the discovery of buckminsterfullerene — a carbon sphere — may well rank with the discovery of the benzene ring — a carbon ring — in the 19th century. The benzene ring ($C_6H_6$) brought the huge field of aromatic chemistry into being, and with it an enormous number of industrial applications.

But what was this "discovery," and how did it come about?

In a sense, like carbon itself, buckyballs also came to us from outer space. Donald Huffman and Wolfgang Krätschmer were astrophysicists studying interstellar soot. Huffman worked for the University of Arizona in Tucson, Krätschmer for the Max Planck Institute in Heidelberg. In 1982, these two gentlemen were superheating graphite rods in a low-pressure helium atmosphere, trying to replicate possible soot-making conditions in the atmosphere of red-giant stars. Their experiment was run in a modest bell-jar zapping apparatus about the size and shape of a washing-machine. Among a great deal of black gunk, they actually manufactured miniscule traces of buckminsterfullerene, which behaved oddly in their spectrometer. At the time, however, they didn't realize what they had.

In 1985, buckminsterfullerene surfaced again, this time in a high-tech laser-vaporization cluster-beam apparatus. Robert Curl and Richard Smalley, two professors of chemistry at Rice University in Houston, knew that a round carbon molecule was theoretically possible. They even knew that it was likely to be yellow in color. And in August 1985, they made a few nanograms of it, detected it with mass spectrometers, and had the honor of naming it, along with their colleagues Harry Kroto, Jim Heath and Sean O'Brien.

In 1985, however, there wasn't enough buckminsterfullerene around to do much more than theorize about. It was "discovered," and named, and argued about in scientific journals, and was an intriguing intellectual curiosity. But this exotic substance remained little more than a lab freak.

And there the situation languished. But in 1988, Huffman and Krätschmer, the astrophysicists, suddenly caught on: this "$C_{60}$" from the chemists in Houston, was probably the very same stuff they'd made by a different process, back in 1982. Harry Kroto, who had moved to the University of Sussex in the meantime, replicated their results in his own machine in England, and was soon producing enough buckminsterfullerene to actually weigh on a scale, and measure, and purify!

The Huffman/Krätschmer

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process made buckminsterfullerene by whole milligrams. Wow! Now the entire arsenal of modern chemistry could be brought to bear: X-ray diffraction, crystallography, nuclear magnetic resonance, chromatography. And results came swiftly, and were published. Not only were buckyballs real, they were weird and wonderful.

In 1990, the Rice team discovered a yet simpler method to make buckyballs, the so-called "fullerene factory." In a thin helium atmosphere inside a metal tank, a graphite rod is placed near a graphite disk. Enough simple, brute electrical power is blasted through the graphite to generate an electrical arc between the disk and the tip of the rod. When the end of the rod boils off, you just crank the stub a little closer and turn up the juice. The resultant exotic soot, which collects on the metal walls of the chamber, is up to 45 percent buckyballs.

In 1990, the buckyball field flung open its stadium doors for anybody with a few gas-valves and enough credit for a big electric bill. These buckyball "factories" sprang up all over the world in 1990 and '91. The "discovery" of buckminsterfullerene was not the big kick-off in this particular endeavor. What really counted was the budget, the simplicity of manufacturing. It wasn't the intellectual breakthrough that made buckyballs a sport — it was the cheap ticket in through the gates. With cheap and easy buckyballs available, the research scene exploded.

Sometimes Science, like other overglamorized forms of human endeavor, marches on its stomach.

As I write this, pure buckyballs are sold commercially for about $2000 a gram, but the market price is in free-fall. Chemists suggest that buckminsterfullerene will be as cheap as aluminum some day soon — a few bucks a pound. Buckyballs will be a bulk commodity, like oatmeal. You may even *eat* them some day — they're not poisonous, and they seem to offer a handy way to package certain drugs.

Buckminsterfullerene may have been "born" in an interstellar star-lab, but it'll become a part of everyday life, your life and my life, like nylon, or latex, or polyester. It may become more famous, and will almost certainly have far more social impact, than Buckminster Fuller's own geodesic domes: those glamorously high-tech structures of the '60s that were the prophetic vision for their molecule-size counterparts.

This whole exciting buckyball scrimmage will almost certainly bring us amazing products yet undreamt-of, everything from grease

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to superhard steels. And, inevitably, it will bring a concomitant set of new problems — buckyball junk, perhaps, or bizarre new forms of pollution, or sinister military applications. This is the way of the world.

But maybe the most remarkable thing about this peculiar and elaborate process of scientific development is that buckyballs never were really "exotic" in the first place. Now that sustained attention has been brought to bear on the phenomenon, it appears that buckyballs are naturally present — in tiny amounts, that is — in almost any sooty, smoky flame. Buckyballs fly when you light a candle, they flew when Bogie lit a cigarette in *Casablanca*; they flew when Neanderthals roasted mammoth fat over the cave fire. Soot we knew about, diamonds we prized — but all this time, carbon, good ol' Element Six, has had a shocking clandestine existence. The "secret" was always there, right in the air, all around all of us.

But when you come right down to it, it doesn't really matter *how* we found out about buckyballs. Accidents are not only fun, but cruicial to the so-called march of science, a march that often moves fastest when it's stumbling down some strange gully that no one knew existed. Scientists are human beings, and human beings are flexible: not a hard, rigidly locked crystal like diamond, but a resilient network. It's a legitimate and vital part of science to recognize the truth — not merely when looking for it with brows furrowed and teeth clenched, but when tripping over it headlong.

Thanks to science, we did find out the truth. And now it's all *different*. Because now we *know*!

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*Jack C. Haldeman II has published over one hundred short stories and novellas in most of the major science fiction magazines of the field. He has twice been a finalist for a Nebula. His most recent book is a TOR double (with Jack Dann) called* Echoes of Thunder, *and TOR will publish his next,* High Steel, *also written in collaboration with Jack Dann. He last appeared in our February issue with a story titled "Lonesome Homesick Blues." "By the Sea" is quite different — a gentle fantasy with an unusual twist.*

# By the Sea

**By Jack C. Haldeman II**

I FARM THE SEA; it is my world. As my boat rocks in the gentle swells of summer, I see Jon working his farm. His, like mine, measures one hundred meters by one hundred meters. It is our birthright, our piece of this good planet. I feel a tug on my net. By the sharp pulls, it must be a dart-fish. My world is good. It is my life.

My son readies the gaff and takes the top off the chest of brine while I pull in the trail net. Brian moves with the easy grace of one born to the sea. It is all he has ever known. Tomorrow he will be ten. I will miss him.

It is a dart-fish, a nice one as long as my arm. As I pull him closer, Brian is removing the smaller fish that have been caught in the mesh of the net. He sorts them quickly, throwing the females with eggs back into the sea, and the rest into the brine. He avoids the nettles and the spines of the uglies. He has not been stung since he was five years old.

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The dart-fish is tightly caught, and we don't need the gaff. Brian takes the billy and stuns the fish on the floor of the boat so that it will not suffer. I remove it and bleed it over the side into the water. It, too, goes in the brine.

"What do you think?" I say. "Is this one for market, or should we put it aside for Marie?"

"This is a fine one," he says, drawing out his words and touching the silver side of the fish lightly. His smile is infectious, and I can't help returning it. This is a game we often play.

"It would do well in the market," he says.

"That is true."

"It would make several meals for Marie," he says.

"That is also true."

Marie and Takki worked the tidal flats until five harvests ago, when Takki was killed in the storm that washed the dock out to sea. Marie lives in the cabin next to us, and she has the bad pain in her joints. She no longer works the flats, and can hardly walk. Like all the others in the village, we take her food and watch out for her. It is nothing special, just something we do. They would do the same for us.

"I think Marie would like this fish," says Brian. "We could smoke it for her."

"We can do that," I say. "But if we give this fish away, we will need more for the market." I am pretending to be stern, but even as I say this, I am stabbed by the fact that the market is three days away, and Brian will no longer be with me. It hardly seems possible. I wish Joan had lived to see him grow. She died when he was very young, the year the black sickness swept the village. I am so proud of him.

"We haven't looked at the prawns in almost a month," he says in a grown-up, serious voice. "They should be ready. We could market the prawns and give the dart-fish to Marie."

I hide my smile as I store the net. It is exactly what I expected him to say. He knows in his heart that we in the village take care of our own. I raise the anchor, and my son rows us to the floats that mark the prawn cages.

Together we grab the floats and wind the wet rope around the two pulleys on the side of the boat. The first cage breaks the surface, and it is clear the harvest will be a good one.

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The prawns are mature and healthy, as long as my hand, with a delicate sheen to their thin shells. We have been very fortunate this year. The plankton beds were good, and no crabs have broken into the prawn cages. We sort them quickly and efficiently, taking only the adult males. My son and I have five cages, and we easily fill two large baskets.

We raise the sail and head for the dot on the horizon that is home. The wind is against us, but it is only a light breeze, and Brian handles the tiller expertly. I have nothing to do but watch the sun drift toward the horizon, turning the sea a deep red as it sets and we tack toward shore.

Marie has lit the lamps on our dock, and, as we secure the boat and start to unload our good harvest, I can see she is sitting on her porch, rocking slowly in her old chair, watching us. I wave, and she waves back. My son looks up at me, an unasked question on his face. I nod, and he grabs the dart-fish and starts to run to Marie's house to show it to her.

"Invite Marie to dinner," I call out after him. "We will have prawns."

He is gone in a flash. I lower the unfurled sail and unload today's catch. It has been a good day, but the dawn will come all too soon.

In our absence, Julian has been by to refill the icebox, and I wrap the prawns in thick paper and store them to cool. I save out a few of the best and, as I suck a chip of the fresh ice, I chop some onion and garlic.

"Such a fine fish," says Marie as she enters our small, one-room house, Brian supporting her. "And look at those lovely prawns! Can I help?"

"Just sit," I say, shelling the prawns. "I've got it."

Her knuckles are swollen, and I know she's had a hard day. It must have been difficult for her to light the dock lamps for us.

My son pulls out our one comfortable chair and helps Marie into it. He is tall for a young boy, and strong. Our life on the sea has made him older than his years, and that is not altogether a bad thing.

"I took the fish to the smokehouse," he says. "Amil wasn't there, so I hung it myself. It will be O.K."

That's true. We share. Amil has the only smokehouse in the village, but that is as it should be. He watches that the fire smolders in the correct manner and does not get too hot. In return, we give him some of our fish.

Brian prepares the stove, and I cut some butter off the hard ball and melt it, stirring in the onions and garlic.

"That smells so good," says Marie. "My Takki would eat anything if it had onions in it."

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"Takki was a fine man," I say as I lay the prawns in the pan and sprinkle shredded goat cheese on top. "A good friend."

I cover the pan and lower the heat. My son and I move our small table in front of Marie. I bring in a wooden crab trap off the porch for me to sit on; Brian will take our other chair.

Dinner is ready, and my son cuts some bread. We eat quietly, aware of how fortunate we are to have the sea's rich harvest in front of us and to be among friends.

As I clear the table, Brian takes the prawn shells out to throw them into the water off the dock. Each night, he feeds the fish and crabs that wait there for him.

"He is a fine boy," says Marie. "You have raised him well."

"I have done my best."

"I'll miss him," she says.

I stare out the window. He is on the dock, sitting back on his heels under the lamp, watching the fish eat the shells for one last time, and I wonder what memories he will take with him when he goes. I can almost feel Joan in the room with me.

He returns, and Marie gets up to leave. He offers to walk her home, and she accepts. When he comes back, his eyes are red. He has been crying, but waited outside until he finished. I know how he feels. I did the same thing on my birthday.

"It always seemed so far away," he says. "Somehow it was like it would never come."

"I know."

"Do I *have* to go?" Tears are silently rolling down his cheeks. He looks so young. I want to hug him, but part of me holds back. It would only make it harder.

"It's the law," I say quietly.

"But I don't want to. I want to be with you."

I give up, reach out and hold him tightly. He is sobbing into my shoulder.

"I remember just how it was on my birthday," I say. "I remember my mother and father and how hard it was to leave them and the farm. We grew vegetables, and I loved the land very much. The soil was dark and rich and, after a rain, it smelled like nothing else on this planet. But I was ten, and my natural parents had shown me what they could of one way of

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life, their way of life. Then it was time for me to learn another way of life."

"But why? Why does it happen that way?"

"People get stale if they know only one way of living; they take things for granted. Sometimes they think their way is the only way, and everybody else is wrong. That leads to trouble. It has happened like that in other places, but it will not happen here."

"But I love the sea like you do," he says, backing away and looking out the window at the water. "I wouldn't be happy anyplace else."

"I felt the same way about the farm when I was your age. But my second father showed me how to love the sea in the same way I loved the land. He was a hard man, but I learned a lot from him and, in a certain way, I loved him, too."

We prepare for bed. Brian wants to stay up all night, and I am willing, but it has been a long day, and he is soon asleep. I turn out the lamp and sit up for a while. My eyes grow used to the dark, and, in the starlight through the window, I watch him sleep. I think of Joan and the years we had, good years, and how the sea has been my only lover since she died.

Our son stirs in his sleep and calls his mother's name. The night passes very slowly.

At first light the wagon comes, and Brian is ready. He is acting grown-up, and says that he will write, and come to visit when he can. I know he means this, but time will pass. His letters will arrive less frequently as he becomes involved with turning into a man, and when he does come to visit, there will be parts of him I do not recognize.

I know this, for it was the same way with my parents. He will love me always, and I him. This I also know. We shake hands, and then we hug each other.

Brian climbs aboard the wagon, wiping grown-up tears from his eyes. A shy young boy gets off, watching me nervously. His name is Daniel. He has grown up at one of the inland villages and, as far as I know, has never seen open water.

The wagon pulls away. I wave to my son, and he waves back. The next time I see him, he will be nearly grown.

Daniel cannot keep his eyes off the sea. I put my arm around my son, and we walk slowly down the path to our home.

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*"Mebodes Fly" is the second Clever Rolf story that Harry Turtledove has written.* Amazing Stories *published the first in 1983. Harry has had a busy year. He became a full-time freelancer last summer and published two new novels.* Krispos of Videssos *appeared in August, and* Earthgrip *appeared in December, both from Del Rey. An alternate history Civil War novel,* The Long Roll, *will be published this fall as a Ballantine hardcover.*

# Mebodes' Fly

**By Harry Turtledove**

VIVIANE THOUGHT CLEVER Rolf the scribe was reckoning up accounts for the baron of Argentan. The baron thought he was doing the same for Herul, who owned the Blue Fox, the best tavern in town. Herul didn't know where he was, or care.

In fact, Clever Rolf was pleasantly horizontal in a little upstairs room at the local sporting house, for which he also kept accounts. He took his pay there, not in the baron's silver or Herul's ale, but in the place's stock-in-trade. Viviane talked too much, and it wasn't as if she owned him.

His pay sat up, jiggling prettily, and reached for the wine jug on the rickety nightstand by the side of the bed. *She* did not talk too bloody much, he thought, and certainly did not bring up the size of his belly,

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which dear Viviane was all too apt to do these days.

The girl offered him a cup of wine. "Thanks Aila," he said, and reached over the edge of the bed for a coin from his trousers. The wine was not free. He found another small bit of silver. "This is for you, and don't tell that old harridan down below you got it."

She wrinkled her nose. "As if I would." They drank together, well pleased with each other. Aila's sandy hair flipped up and down as she suddenly nodded, remembering something. She put a warm hand on his arm. "Somebody was up here the other day, asking for you."

Clever Rolf scratched his head. "Easier ways to find me than that. Who was he? What did he want?" He wondered which one of his little schemes had gone wrong. Had the baron found out he was involved with the sporting house? Surely not — if old Bardulf wanted to make something of that, he knew well enough where the scribe lived.

Aila said, "I didn't see him myself, and I'm glad of it; from what Mintrud told us afterward, he was cruel. He looked it, too, she said: tall, skinny, somber, with a great hawk's beak of a nose. He spoke with an Easterling accent."

"A rogue born," declared Clever Rolf, who was no taller than Aila, pudgy (too much good bear at the Blue Fox, he always thought), and snub-nosed. "Not a rogue I know, though. What name did he use?"

"Wait. She said it. Let me think. Mi—Ma—Mebodes; that was it. . . . Rolf, what's wrong?"

She sprang up quickly, but not as fast as Clever Rolf, who was already scrambling into his breeches. He put on his tunic back-to-front, and never noticed. A scheme had gone wrong, all right, but no little one — Mebodes was the wizard from whom he'd stolen Viviane. Having lived with her awhile, he was perfectly willing to give her back, but he feared that wouldn't be good enough. Nobody knew much about Mebodes, but his reputation was black. And wizards, black, white, gray—pink, for that matter—enjoyed revenge.

"What will I do?" he mumbled in despair. "What will I do?"

He took the stairs two at a time and dashed through the reception hall, angering the madam and frightening a couple of customers (which angered her more). He was past caring. In blind panic, he flung the door open, crashed it shut after him.

"How kind," a cold voice said. "The mouse runs into the cat's jaws."

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*Cruel,* Aila had told him. He discovered how little weight a word has, next to reality. Mebodes loomed over him. The wizard's eyes were huge, yellow, and unwinking as a falcon's. Clever Rolf saw himself reflected in them. His reflection did not look clever; it looked small, disheveled, and scared. The reflection, he thought, did not lie.

"I m-meant no harm," he quavered. "I c-can explain—"

"What care I for your lies?" Mebodes' hands twitched in anticipation of the torment Clever Rolf would know. His fingers were long, pale, and many-jointed, like a cave spider's legs. He filed each nail to a point.

"But —," Clever Rolf squeaked.

The wizard spat in front of him; his spittle steamed, as if boiling hot. "Had you owned to your crimes, I might have given you a quick, clean ending. But as you snivel like an insect, I think it only just that insects bring you your fate. Sometime soon, they shall. Until then, your life will be — interesting." With a mocking bow, Mebodes stepped round the corner into an alley.

More terrified of standing frozen than of moving, Clever Rolf darted after him, to beg forgiveness one last time. The alley was empty.

He started for home, his knees still knocking. Halfway there a wasp buzzed out of its nest of mud, stung him on the back of the hand, and flew away. He yelped and cursed and plunged his arm into the cool water of a horse trough, none of which did much good. His head went up like a hunted animal's — was that the ghost of chilling laughter on the breeze?

He snarled at Viviane when he got back, and she screeched at him. It might have turned into a nightlong brawl, but the good smell of mutton stew was rising from the pot that bubbled over the fire. Viviane made a couple of pointed remarks about his caring more for his stomach than for her, but served him a big bowlful. Whatever her other faults, she could cook. *Maybe that's why I don't heave her out on her rump,* he thought, digging in with his spoon. He raised a big chunk of meat to his mouth.

Pleasure turned to horror as he began to chew. Instead of the savor of fat mutton, an acrid taste filled his mouth. He choked, gagged, spat, then gaped at the tabletop, his eyes bulging and stomach heaving. In place of the meat he had put into his mouth, there was a gob of little brown ants, most of them dead, but some still feebly moving. More tiny legs kicked against his tongue and the inside of his cheeks.

He rinsed his mouth again and again with ale, wondering each time if

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it would turn to scorpions as it passed his lips. Viviane was, for once, speechless. "Remind me not to go rescuing damsels in distress," Clever Rolf wheezed when he could speak again. "Your precious Mebodes has a sense of humor I don't care for." He told her what had happened.

She paled. "You wouldn't hand me back to him, would you?" She had come to know him well enough to make it a serious question.

"He didn't show any signs of wanting you back, my sweet," said Clever Rolf. Viviane glowered at him; no woman cares to hear she is unwanted. Clever Rolf was too caught up in his own fear to worry about her feelings. He went on: "And if he did try to take you, I don't know what I could do to stop him. No, he's after vengeance now, and all from me, all from me."

The scribe sat with his head in his hands, staring at the bowl of stew in front of him. "Do I dare?" he muttered. At last, with trembling hand, he raised another spoonful to his mouth. He gulped it down, as if hoping to swallow before he could find out whether it had turned dreadful.

Nothing happened. He ate more, with growing confidence — maybe Mebodes was still loosing warning bolts from his catapult. Then, with no warning at all, Clever Rolf bit down on a mouthful of beetles. They crunched between his teeth.

He kept shuddering long after the noxious taste was gone — he wouldn't be able to trust another bite of food for as long as he had left. This was no fun at all. Never had one of his finaglings come home to roost so disastrously.

He got through breakfast next morning without catastrophe, but only wondered what Mebodes had waiting for him. Jamming a disreputable hat onto his head, he hurried out the door. For one, he really did have to see to the baron's books.

Mebodes was waiting for him. "Why hello, my friend," he said, though his voice made the word a lie. "I trust you enjoyed your evening meal."

"Screw you," Clever Rolf said. It was not courage, or even defiance —more on the order of having nothing left to lose.

The wizard laughed. "Such spirit! Anyone would think you had the means with which to back up your insolence. Unfortunately for you, we both know that is not the case, do we not? No, I fear you must continue to savor your richly deserved punishment yet a while longer. For your pluck, though, I shall grant you a boon."

"Save it," Clever Rolf said.

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"No, no, I insist — and who are you to say me nay?" Mebodes chuckled, a sound that made Clever Rolf want to hide. "Here is my boon: I grant it to you to know your end. You shall recognize the envenomed fly that bears your doom by its eyes, which shall be golden as my own, to remind me of you in your final moments."

The wizard stalked away, lifting his trousers to keep the muck in Argentan's dirt streets from soiling them.

Clever Rolf did not bother following him. All he had to be thankful for was that it was early, and no one had seen him cringing. His head hung; he muttered hopeless curses under his breath as he tramped past the Blue Fox.

An apple tree stood outside the tavern, its fragrant blossoms opening as the sun began to climb in the sky. Bees happily buzzed round the flowers. Or they did until Clever Rolf came by — then the buzz turned furious. As though they were so many hawks, they dove on the scribe.

He shrieked when the first one stung him. Ice ran up his back as he heard the rising, angry drone. Without conscious thought, he jumped through the Blue Fox's doorway.

The hour being so early — for everyone save Clever Rolf and, worse luck for him, the bees — the tavern was almost deserted. One old soak sat blearily at a table, nursing the mug of thin, sour beer to which Herul staked him every day until he cadged enough coins for a stronger fare. And Herul himself, an immensely fat man — fatter than Clever Rolf —with a black beard that reached what had once been his waist, but now might be called his equator, stood by the fire, stirring a pot of porridge. It was thick, strong stuff, and bubbled merrily as Herul dragged his long-handled spoon through it.

"Get out from there, Rolf, you whoreson!" he roared as Clever Rolf dove behind the bar. Save for a yip as a bee stung him on the forehead, the scribe did not answer. He grabbed a dipper, plunged it into the cask of mead that sat between red wine and porter, and sloshed a great sticky puddle of fermented honey over the polished top of the bar.

Herul roared again, louder this time. "Out, out, you dizzard, you loon, you crackbrained jobbernowl, and never come back! I'll make my own reckonings of profit from now on — you, you're a dead loss."

"Oh, put a cork in it, suet-chops," Clever Rolf said with dignity. His stings throbbed, but he was not getting any more of them. Next to the

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perfume of mead, Mebodes' magic was magic no more. The bees droned down to the puddle one by one. A couple flew away, weaving slightly from the potent brew. The rest stayed to gorge themselves. Clever Rolf crushed them all with a big skillet, then set to work digging the stings out of his flesh.

Herul bore down on him, fist clenched on the long-handled spoon. He realized he was brandishing it like a club, slowly lowered it. His eyes went back and forth from Clever Rolf to the smashed bees.

"Here." The scribe dropped a coin on the bar next to the puddle. "This should cover a dipper of mead. I always thought it was vile stuff, but it came in handy today." Leaving Herul and his solitary customer staring after him, he strolled out of the Blue Fox.

Though one eye was puffed shut, he was whistling as he reached the baron's keep. The half-victory his quick wits had won him gave him back his hope; maybe he could find some way to save his hide (however punctured) from Mebodes after all.

He did not, unfortunately, have any idea of what that way might be.

Bardulf was brusquely sympathetic to his lumps and bumps. "I got stung myself, a couple of years ago," the baron remarked. "Bees are nasty things."

"Yes, sir," Clever Rolf said. He hurried up the spiral stair to the castle's record room. Dust puffed under his feet as he made his way to the accounts — but for him, few people came here.

The parchment account-scrolls smelled of old dust. As a scribe, Clever Rolf found the odor as comfortable as the old shoes he wore. It was doubly welcome today: no risk that musty smell would draw any stinging bees, he thought. He bent above the scroll, frowning when he saw how much the baron had spent for horse leeching.

A silverfish scuttled over the parchment. One day, Clever Rolf thought, all of Bardulf's records would be bug turds, and a good thing, too. But this insect moved with malignant purpose. It darted onto Clever Rolf's hand, then scurried up his arm inside the sleeve of his tunic.

The scribe gave a stifled scream and swatted frantically. The silverfish might have been dipped in liquid fire. It drew a line of agony behind it everywhere it ran. Clever Rolf sprang up from the table, ripped the tunic off over his head. The silverfish was in the matted hair on his belly. Sobbing, he knocked it to the floor and stepped on it. Wherever it had

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touched him, his skin was an angry red. The pain remained fresh when he went home that evening.

He faced supper with a certain amount of dread, but Mebodes did not disturb his meal. But when he and Viviane went to bed, a horde of ants emerged from the mattress ticking and crawled all over them like an animated brown carpet. Naked but for ants, Clever Rolf and Viviane ran for the creek and plunged in, scrubbing at their hair and digging the insects out of their ears and noses.

When they looked up, Mebodes stood at the stream bank, a glow of pleasure in his terrible eyes. He bowed mockingly toward Viviane. "Only fair you should have your share of enjoyment, too, my dear." Then to Clever Rolf again: "Not long now before the fly." He gestured, as if to make a sorcerous pass. Both his victims ducked under the water. When they raised their heads again, he was gone.

Viviane shivered, half from the chill of the creek, half from fury. "Ohhh!" she said, a long syllable of rage. "He is *such* a wicked man! Even the other wizards hate him."

"And I don't blame them —" Clever Rolf stopped in amazement. He stared at her with something closer to real affection than he had shown her for a long time.

"Let go of me!" she exclaimed a moment later. "Stop that, you shameless lecher! Stop it, I say — or at least let's get out on the grass. Let's —*mmglmph*!"

Clever Rolf was not listening anymore.

When he got an idea, he seized the bit in his teeth and ran away with it. He set out that very night, leaving a rolled-up blanket in bed in the hope that Mebodes might think he was still at home. He even left his mule behind and went by shanks' mare. By the time the sun came up, he was halfway to Estreby, which was a larger town than Argentan and boasted a wizard in residence.

Clever Rolf was footsore and yawning by the time he found the wizard's establishment on a side street between a farrier and an apothecary. The sign simply said "Rigord." Either one knew who he was, or not.

Rigord proved to be a tall, sleepy-looking fellow in his forties; his chamber was dustier than Bardulf's record room. He was not, however, lightly befooled. When Clever Rolf tried to present a circumspect version of his difficulties, the wizard drawled, "Ah yes, heard about you: the fellow

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who diddled Mebodes. Wants his own back now, does he?"

"Well — yes," Clever Rolf admitted.

Without haste, Rigord got up and dug out an astrological tome and an abacus. He cast a quick horoscope, flicking beads back and forth and muttering to himself as he calculated. At last, when Clever Rolf was quivering with anxiety, he said, "I can help, I reckon. Mebodes is strong, but so full of his affairs that he leaves himself vulnerable to magic. Now" — and Rigord's sleepiness fell away — "what's it worth to you?"

Clever Rolf had been waiting for that question, but not so soon. "Ah —three silver marks."

"This is your *life* we're speaking of," Rigord reminded him scornfully.

"Very well, then — a whole gold piece. I am not a rich man."

"No?" Rigord leaned forward. "What about the treasure you stole from Mebodes along with your leman?"

Clever Rolf quailed. "You know too much. I'll pay you six marks."

"I want the treasure — all of it."

"Would you beggar me? I'll give you two gold pieces, or even two and a mark."

"The treasure." Implacable, Rigord folded his arms and waited.

"I've spent some of it," the scribe said miserably.

"How much? The truth — I will know if you lie." The wizard made a quick pass.

"Maybe a quarter."

"The balance will do nicely — if, of course, you truly want my aid."

Clever Rolf yielded; as Rigord knew, he had to yield. "All right," he said, very low, the picture of a beaten man.

They dickered over terms after that; the scribe did not want to pay before Mebodes was driven off. At last he agreed to let Rigord lay a geas on him, compelling him to fetch the treasure once the magician had met his half of the bargain. The spell was quickly and competently cast. Clever Rolf's mercurial hopes began to revive; Rigord knew what he was about. He might well prove a match for Mebodes.

And deep inside, where it did not show, the scribe was chortling. Mebodes' treasure was largely brass, worth a mark and a half at the outside. Rigord would have done better for himself had he been a less steely haggler. That, however, Clever Rolf thought, was Rigord's problem.

When they went back to Argentan, Rigord rode a mule while Clever

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Rolf walked once more. The wizard's beast had as lackadaisical a disposition as that which he affected, so the scribe, sore feet and all, had no trouble keeping up.

It was almost evening when Rigord's nostrils started twitching; he and Clever Rolf were still a mile or so outside Argentan. The scribe sniffed, too. "Night-blooming jasmine," he said. "We have some of the finest in the duchy."

"Quiet, fool." As it did at need, Rigord's laziness disappeared. "It's the reek of evil sorcery I smell." He paused, considering. "Aye, likely Mebodes. The spells have an eastern flavor to them."

"Spells?" Clever Rolf's fears flooded back. "Are they done?" If they were, he was likely doomed no matter what Rigord did.

The wizard extracted a packet of whitish powder from his robe, poured a little into the palm of one hand. He mumbled an incantation, moving his other hand in small, jerky passes. Then he spat into the powder. It bubbled and turned a faint pink. "Close, but not quite," he told the anxiously waiting scribe. "Were it red, you could visit the undertaker now and save yourself the wait."

"Heh, heh," Clever Rolf said in hollow tones. "By the gods, then, find him and deal with him before it's too late." He had an inspiration. "If you don't, you'll never see his treasure, you know."

That seemed to stir Rigord. He sniffed again, worked a quick divination with a green twig. It hung suspended in the air. "That way," he said, squinting along it. He repeated the divination several times as they got into town. Night had fallen by then; hardly anyone was in the street to ask questions.

At last the floating twig pointed squarely at a two-story building bigger and finer than most. "He's in there," Rigord said decisively. "On the second floor, by the angle of things, behind that window there — here now, you idiot, what's so funny?"

"Angle of things, forsooth." Clever Rolf had to fight back hysterical laughter. "It's the town bawdy house."

"Is it indeed? So much the better; if Mebodes is with one of the wenches, he'll hardly be minding his wardspells. Like as not, this is what I saw back in my study."

"'Affairs,' eh? So that's what you meant. Well, all right — now nail the bastard."

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"Hush," Rigord said absently. He had lit a small lamp and was heating several strong-smelling potions and liquids over it. Then he poured them one after the other into a small, deep silver bowl. A puff of pungent steam rose from it. Clever Rolf sneezed.

"Hush," Rigord said again. He was chanting now, in Iverian dialect so thick Clever Rolf could hardly follow it. The hair rose on the back of the scribe's neck; he could feel the magical force Rigord was concentrating in that bowl.

The wizard's voice went harsh and deep: "Fiery spirit of the void, I summon thee! Come forth, O salamander; come forth, come forth!" A sphere of coruscating flame rose from the silver bowl. It threw sparks —red, gold, white — into the night. Clever Rolf's mouth fell open in awe.

At Rigord's urging, the salamander slowly floated toward the sporting house. It drifted in through the open second-story window. After a moment of silence, twin screams rang out, one soprano and frightened, the other a baritone roar of outrage that changed in mid-cry to a howl of pain.

"You did it! You did it!" Clever Rolf cried. Exhaustion forgotten, he capered about, hugging himself with glee. "I hope your fireball roasts him like a capon!"

"Then you'll likely be disappointed," Rigord said. "Wizards aren't that easy to kill. But you should be rid of him for a while."

As if to prove him right, Mebodes came diving out of the window by which the salamander had entered. He was a sadly different sorcerer from the one who had terrorized Clever Rolf. Landing in the muddy street with a bone-jarring thump, he got to his feet and ran, the salamander in hot —in both the literal and figurative senses of the word — pursuit. Mebodes would have fled faster had he not had to reach down every couple of strides to haul up his unbuttoned breeches. Each time he did, the salamander scorched his bare backside.

Aila appeared at the window through which Mebodes had crashed. "Serves you right," she shouted at him as he vanished into the night. Then she looked down toward Clever Rolf, who was still cheering in the street below. When she recognized him, she said, "Come on up. You can have this one free, for ridding me of that scoundrel." As she was wearing her working clothes — which is to say, nothing much — the invitation's appeal was immediate and urgent.

"Remember the geas," Rigord called to Clever Rolf, but the scribe's

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hearing could be very selective when he chose.

Afterward, in the comfort of a well-warmed bed, he gave Aila the whole story (though Viviane, had she heard, would have been furious at how small her role was). Aila giggled when he told how he had used Rigord's covetousness against him. "These wizards, they're not so much," he said grandly.

The candle by the bed lured moths and other insects into the little chamber. For the first time in days, Clever Rolf listened to their flutterings and dronings without a sense of panic. Then one buzzed down to settle on his arm. Aila's face twisted with fear. "Rolf," she quavered, "look at its eyes! That's — that's Mebodes' fly!"

The scribe reached out with a thumb and killed the insect, whose eyes were indeed golden like the wizard's.

Aila stared. "How could you—?"

"Nothing simpler, my sweet." He showed her the dead fly; it had no mouthparts. "For one thing, Rigord told me his spell wasn't finished. But I didn't need Rigord to know that. After all" — he leered at her, his sense of his own quick wit at last completely restored — "didn't you just watch Mebodes running away down the street with his fly undone?"


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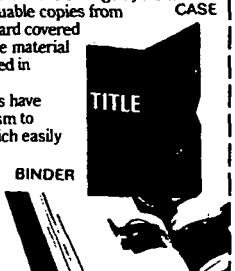


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# FILMS

## KATHI MAIO

## A BEAST INSIDE AND OUT

IT'S GETTING harder and harder every day to separate the marketing strategies and tie-in product merchandising from movies. This is especially true where Walt Disney Pictures is concerned. But, with or without the hoopla and folderol, there's no questioning that Disney hit it big with *Beauty and the Beast.* The film has garnered honors (including an Oscar nomination for Best Picture) hitherto unheard of for an animated feature. At the box office, this holiday season flick was still around to usher in the spring. By the end of February, it had grossed $115 million. (And that *doesn't* include the teapot, dolls, books, lunchboxes, nightshirts, etc.)

Whether the film actually deserved the level of attention it received is debatable. It is, undeniably, vintage Disney. Scores of animators worked thousands of hours using conventional animation techniques, augmenting them, at times (like the ballroom dance scene), with computerized methods. The full-length cartoon that results is certainly competent, but less than mind-blowing.

Some viewers notice fingernails that are there one minute and gone the next. Others complain about cheesy effects like the flat tableau of humanity at the film's conclusion. Even supervising animator Glen Keane has admitted that the film could have been "100 percent better" if Jeffrey Katzenberg and other Disney moguls had given his team eight more months to complete their work.

With no pretension of expertise regarding animation, I was more intrigued with the absurdities of the movie's plot. For example, the angry mob had no problem finding the Beast's castle even though they'd never been there before. But Belle's Dad couldn't find his way back after a memorable round-trip that cost him a daughter. And you

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wonder how *anyone* could miss the place, sitting on top of a mountain like that.

I sometimes think that the folks who make cartoon features play fast and loose with logic and continuity because they think they can get away with it. (With all those bright-colored visuals and energetic songs, they often can.) And then there's the mindset that says "it's only a kid's picture." We'd hope that Disney would be above such a stance, not only because it's an insult against children, but in this case, because it's simply false.

Disney went out of its way to market this movie to adults as well as children. *Beauty and the Beast* is designed to remind grown-ups of fond childhood memories like *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.* And it can't be an accident that the doe-eyed Belle looks like Ariel's big sister. She was obviously drawn to hook those millions of tiny *Little Mermaid* fans.

Old-fashioned, yet thoroughly up-to-date was the image they were hoping to capture. For the modern touch, violent action sequence and Broadway style production numbers were tacked on to the familiar story. Disney's newfangled/old-time marketing concept also accounts for the oxymoronic label "Instant Classic," which studio flacksters used in their aggressive promotional campaign and which most critics were quick to parrot.

Not me. I don't even consider *Beauty and the Beast* a *future* classic. I found it to be a cold-hearted exercise in demographic research. Disney put together a cleverly designed product in an attractive package, and they never would have pulled it off without the abundant charms of the original legend.

The basic themes go back at least as far as the marriage of Eros and Psyche. But the telling on which most twentieth century versions is based is the mid-18th century fairy tale of Mme. Marie LePrince de Beaumont. Her tale of a virtuous and beautiful young woman who finds contentment with the equally virtuous if somewhat unsightly fellow has been retold again and again, and presented repeatedly on stage, and on both the large and small screens.

For many film buffs, the most memorable account of the fable still remains Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et La Bete* (1946). The melancholy power of Jean Marais as the courtly monster still communicates itself easily to viewers. Here is a romantic hero even modern audiences can't help but fall head over heels in love with.

For me, it was only when La

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Bete was finally transformed into a bland, blonde prince that his charisma waned. I get the feeling that Ron Koslow must have felt the same way. He knew the allure of the wild thing with gentle ways, so he gave the modern-day Beast he created for CBS a Popeye-like "I yam what I yam" attitude to go with his unusual leonine looks. After all, in 1987's New York, an ugly guy could have consulted a plastic surgeon and started hormone therapy. But as Catherine (Linda Hamilton) knew full well, Vincent (Ron Perlman) needed no transformation.

Vincent was the purrfect man. This knight of the underground was capable of deep, unconditional love and total devotion. He was there for his woman when she needed him most. (Mess with her, and he'd literally tear you limb from limb.) If called upon, he would offer up an unlimited supply of thoughtful advice, kind words, and gentle, comforting embraces. And yet, he always allowed Catherine her own space. He respected her instincts and her intelligence. He supported her career. He might have looked like a beast, but he was never an animal about, you know, SEX.

The series, which premiered in 1987, had a relatively short and troubled life. But it won a core audience of true fanatics that keep the show in re-runs, somewhere on the dial, to this very day. Most of that devout audience consisted of adult women. Is there any wonder why? Freud could have taken notes from this series. Vincent is, without doubt, What Women Want.

The Disney version is something else again. This Beast, drawn by Glen Keane, voiced by Robby Benson, and written by Linda Woolverton, truly is a monster, inside and out. He doesn't just look bad, he *is* bad. He is selfish, and has the kind of abusive bad temper that causes his servants to tremble when he approaches. This is not what women want. But this is, presumably, what Disney wants us to want.

Unlike Vincent, this guy isn't our dream date, he's our date from hell. We believe that he exists. (Boy, do we.) But why would we want to make a life with him? Well, as this particular fairy tale indicates, we might not have much choice. The romantic possibilities for Disney's young heroine consist of a self-centered hairy guy with a bad temper or a handsome ignoramus, here named Gaston, who wants to keep her barefoot and pregnant, massaging his smelly feet when she's not cooking up the animals he's killed.

Some choice! Makes you wonder why Belle bothered to make it. Especially since Disney has pro-

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moted their Beauty as the most autonomous cartoon heroine ever. Again, the critics bought the press-packet marketing. Review after review called Belle "active," "independent" and even "feminist" and "liberated."

But is she really any improvement over Ariel, or even Snow White? Only in the most superficial sense. Unlike Ariel, she's not so love crazy that she's willing to sacrifice everything to walk silently at the side of the man she loves. (She sacrifices everything for her papa, instead.) And, unlike the rosy-cheeked Snow White, you get the feeling that Belle might not be totally fulfilled by a life of scrubbing and baking for a bunch of garden gnomes.

But Belle's happy ending might not be much of an improvement. She dreams of far-flung adventures, but what she gets is the romantic solution offered to every other Disney heroine before her. Only with considerably more risk attached.

Belle doesn't even get a certified love-at-first-sight Mr. Right. She marries, instead, a guy with a history of abusive and self-indulgent behavior. Of course, Disney's Beast has changed for good and always. (That's what they all say.) And it's that inner- as well as outer-transformation that has me worried.

The traditional rendering of *Beauty and the Beast* tells us that a good man can be hidden beneath a rough exterior. This is the kind of anti-lookism message that was worth promoting in the 18th century, and is even more valuable in these superficial times. (I just *wish* it would be applied to *women* once in a while . . . Fat chance!)

Disney's version, however, isn't about how a woman shouldn't judge a book by its cover. It's about how a woman should re-write the pages inside. The influence of a good woman, they tell us, can turn a cruel man into a saint. A girl of intelligence and beauty has the right stuff to soothe the savage breast.

I've read that book before. And I still don't believe it.

Perhaps I'm the only person who finds this a frightening sermon to deliver to our little girls. I am horrified that this charming little family film seems to imply that women are somehow responsible for controlling men's anti-social behavior. It's like something out of a battered wife's most guilt-ridden delusions: If only I were pretty enough and nice enough, he wouldn't hit me.

So much for "liberated" heroines. The Disney corruption of "Beauty and the Beast" is far from an improvement over its source material. And there is nothing

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modern about its message. Much better to have the Beast of yore with "a good heart," whose essential kindness and devotion touched the heart of a beautiful woman, and the imagination of generations of children.

Bring back Vincent. And show Disney's Beast the door.

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*Bradley Denton ("Rerun Roy, Donna and the Freak" October/November 1991) grew up in Kansas. Ever since he attended the University of Kansas in 1976, he has wanted to write a story about the raid on Lawrence that occurred in 1863 — one of many guerilla raids in Kansas and Missouri and in many ways, one of the worst. "I didn't know how to approach the story until the summer of 1991," Brad writes, "when I realized that with only one plausible change in earlier events, a certain displaced steamboat pilot could have been present during the raid. After all, he himself had been a member of a Missouri guerilla band in the spring of 1861, but had deserted that band after only a few weeks and had then gone West with his brother. . . ."*

# THE TERRITORY

**By Bradley Denton**

SAM CAME AWAKE AND sat up choking. His chest was as tight as if wrapped in steel cables, and his heart was trying to hammer its way out. He gulped a breath and coughed. The air in the abandoned barn was thick with dust. There was just enough light for him to see the swirling motes.

A few feet away, the skinny form of Fletcher Taylor groaned and rose on one elbow. "What the hell's wrong?" he asked.

"Shut the hell up," the man on the other side of Taylor said.

"You go to hell," Taylor snapped.

"Go to hell yourself."

"Let me sleep, or I'll send you all to hell," another man said.

"The hell you will."

"The hell I won't."

Taylor shook a finger at Sam. "See all the hell you've raised?"

Sam put on the new slouch hat that Taylor had given him, pulled on his boots, and stood, picking up the leather saddlebags he'd been using as a pillow. "I'm sorry as hell," he said, and left the barn, trying not to kick

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more than four or five of the other men on his way out.

The light was better outside, but the sun had not yet risen. Sam closed his left nostril with a finger and blew through his right, then closed his right nostril and blew through his left, trying to clear his head of dust. The ground was dry. The thunderheads that had formed the night before had rolled by without dropping enough rain to fill a teacup. He could have slept outside, in clean air, and been fine. As it was, his head ached. This wasn't the first night he had spent in a barn or corn crib since leaving the river, but he still wasn't used to it. At three months shy of twenty-eight, he feared that he was already too old for this kind of life.

Most of the camp was still asleep, but a few men were building fires and boiling chicory. One of them gestured to Sam to come on over, but Sam shook his head and pointed at the sycamore grove that served as the camp latrine. The other man nodded.

Sam went into the trees, and within twenty steps the smells of chicory and smoke were overwhelmed by the smell caused by two hundred men all doing their business in the same spot over the course of a week. It was even worse than usual this morning, because the leaders of other guerrilla bands had brought some of their own men into camp the day before. But at least Sam had the grove to himself for now.

When he had finished his business, he continued eastward through the grove until the stench faded and the trees thinned. Then he sat down with his back against the bole of a sycamore and opened one of his saddlebags. He removed his Colt Navy revolver and laid it on the ground beside him, then took out a pen, a bottle of ink, and the deerhide pouch that held his journal. He slid the notebook from the pouch and flipped pages until he reached a blank sheet, then opened the ink bottle, dipped his pen, and began to write.

*Tuesday, August 11, 1863:*

*I have had the same dream again, or I should say, another variation thereof. This time when I reached the dead man, I discovered that his face was that of my brother Henry. Then I awoke with the thought that it was my fault that Henry was on board the* Pennsylvania *when she blew, which in turn led to the thought that I was an idiot to ask a young and unsure physician to give him morphine.*

*But I would have been on the* Pennsylvania *as well had it not been for the malice of a certain William Brown, perhaps the only man caught in*

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*that storm of metal, wood, and steam who received what he deserved. As for the morphine, Dr. Peyton himself instructed me to ask the night doctor to give Henry an eighth of a grain should he become restless. If the doctor administered too much, the fault was his, not mine.*

*I see by my words that I have become hard. But five years have passed since that night in Memphis, and I have seen enough in those years that the hours I spent at Henry's deathbed do not seem so horrific now – or, at least, they do not seem so during my waking hours.*

A pistol shot rang out back at camp and was followed by the shouted curses of men angry at having been awakened. Someone had killed a rat or squirrel, and might soon wish that he'd let the creature live to gnaw another day. These once-gentle Missouri farmboys had become as mean as bobcats. They generally saved their bullets for Bluebellies, but didn't mind using their fists and boots on each other.

*The dream seems more pertinent,* Sam continued, *on those nights when the man's face is that of Orion. Orion was as intolerable a scold as any embittered crone, and a Republican crone at that – but he was my brother, and it might have been in my power to save him.*

Sam paused, rolling the pen between his fingers. He looked up from the paper and stared at the brightening eastern sky until his eyes stung. Then he dipped the pen and resumed writing.

*It is as fresh and awful in my memory as if it had happened not two years ago, but two days ago.*

*I could have fought the Red Legs, as Orion and our companions tried to do. I had a Smith & Wesson seven-shooter. If I had used it, I would have either preserved Orion's life, or fallen beside him. Either result would have been honorable.*

*But I faltered. When the moment came, I chose to surrender, and handed over my pistol – which one of the Red Legs laughed at, saying he was glad I had not fired the weapon, for to be struck with a ball from its barrel might give one a nasty welt.*

*Then, as if to prove his point, he turned it on the driver, and on the conductor, and on Mr. Bemis, and on my brother.*

*As Orion lay dying, the Red Leg attempted to shoot me as well. But the pistol misfired, and I ran. Two of the Red Legs caught me and took my watch, but then let me go, saying that killing a Missourian the likes of me would not be so advantageous to their cause as letting me live.*

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*I continued to run like the coward I had already proven myself to be.*

Sam paused again. His hand was shaking, and he didn't think he would be able to read the jagged scrawl of what he had just written. But he would always know what the words said.

He rubbed his forehead with his wrist, then turned the notebook page and dipped his pen.

*I could not have saved Henry. But Orion would be alive today, safe in Nevada Territory, had I been a man. And I would be there with him instead of here at Blue Springs; I would be thriving in the mountains of the West instead of sweltering in the chaos of Western Missouri.*

*I have remained in Missouri to pay for my sin, but in two years have had no success in doing so. Perhaps now that I have come to Jackson County and fallen in with the Colonel's band, my luck will change.*

*When this war began, I served with my own county's guerrilla band, the Marion Rangers, for three weeks. But there the actual need for bushwhacking was about as substantial as an owl's vocabulary. That was before I had crossed the state, entered Kansas, and encountered the Red Legs. That was before I had seen my brother shot down as if he were a straw target.*

*I have not had a letter from Mother, Pamela, or Mollie in several weeks, although I have written to each of them as often as I can. I do not know whether this means that they have disowned me, or whether their letters are not reaching Independence. I intend to go up to investigate once this coming business is completed, assuming that it does not complete me in the process.*

Sam laid the journal on the ground and wiped his ink-stained fingers on the grass. Then he peered into the ink bottle and saw that it was almost empty. He decided not to buy more until he was sure he would live long enough to use it.

The sun had risen and was a steady heat on Sam's face. The day was going to be hot. Another shot rang out back at camp, and this time it was followed by yips and hollers. The boys were up and eager.

Sam slid his journal into its pouch, then returned it and the other items to the saddlebag. He stood, stretched, and walked back to Colonel Quantrill's camp.

As he emerged from the sycamores, Sam saw fifty or sixty of his fellow

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bushwhackers clustered before Quantrill's tent. The tent was open, and the gathered men, although keeping a respectful distance, were trying to see and hear what was going on inside. Fletcher Taylor was standing at the rear of the cluster, scratching his sparse beard.

"'Morning, Fletch," Sam said as he approached. "Sleep well?"

Taylor gave him a narrow-eyed glance. "Rotten, thanks to you."

"Well, you're welcome."

"Be quiet. I'm trying to hear."

"Hear what?"

"You know damn well what. The Colonel's planning a raid. Most of the boys are betting it'll be Kansas City, but my money's on Lawrence."

Sam nodded. "The story I hear is that the Colonel's wanted to teach Jim Lane and Lawrence a lesson ever since he lived there himself."

A man standing in front of Taylor turned to look at them. "I'd like to teach Jim Lane a lesson too," he said, "but I'm not crazy and neither's the Colonel. Lawrence is forty miles inside the border, and the Bluebellies are likely to be as thick as flies on a dead possum. It'd be like putting our pistols to our own heads."

"Maybe," Sam said.

The man raised an eyebrow. "What do you mean, maybe? You know something I don't?"

Sam shrugged and said nothing. Two nights before, in a dream, he had seen Colonel Quantrill surrounded by a halo of fire, riding into Lawrence before a band of shooting, shouting men. He had known the town was Lawrence because all of its inhabitants had looked like the caricatures he had seen of Senator Jim Lane and had worn red pants. Sam had learned to trust his dreams when they were as clear as that. Several days before the *Pennsylvania* had exploded, a dream had shown him Henry lying in a coffin; and before he and Orion had left St. Joseph, a dream had shown him Orion lying dead in the dust. But it wouldn't do to talk of his dreams with the other bushwhackers. Most of them seemed to think that Sam Clemens was odd enough as it was, hoarding perfectly good ass-wiping paper just so he could write on it.

"Well, you're wrong," the man said, taking Sam's shrug as a statement. "Kansas City's got it coming just as bad, and there's places for a man to hide when he's done."

Taylor looked thoughtful. "I see your point," he said. "Calling on

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Senator Lane would be one thing, but coming home from the visit might be something else."

Sam stayed quiet. It didn't matter what the others thought now. They would mold bullets and make cartridges until they were told where to shoot them, and they'd be just as happy to shoot them in Lawrence as anywhere else – happier, since most of the jayhawkers and Red Legs who had robbed them, burned them out of their homes, killed their brothers, and humiliated their women had either hailed from Lawrence or pledged their allegiance to Jim Lane. And if Quantrill could pull several guerrilla bands together under his command, he would have enough men both to raid Lawrence and to whip the Federals on the way there and back.

Captain George Todd emerged from the tent and squinted in the sunlight. He was a tall, blond, square-jawed man whom some of the men worshipped even more than they did Quantrill. He was wearing a blue jacket he'd taken from a dead Union lieutenant.

"Hey, cap'n, where we going?" someone called out.

Todd gave the men a stern look. "I doubt we'll be going anywhere if you boys keep standing around like sick sheep when there's guns to be cleaned and bridles to be mended."

The men groaned, but began to disperse.

"Fletch Taylor!" Todd yelled. "Wherever you are, get your ass in here!" He turned and went back into the tent.

Sam nudged Taylor. "Now, what would a fine leader of men like George Todd be wanting with a lowdown thief like you?" he asked.

Taylor sneered. "Well, he told me to keep my eyes open for Yankee spies," he said, "so I reckon he'll be wanting me to give him your name." He started for the tent.

"I'm not worried!" Sam called after him. "He'll ask you to spell it, and you'll be stumped!"

Taylor entered the tent, and someone pulled the flaps closed. Sam stood looking at the tent for a moment longer, then struck off across camp in search of breakfast. Why Quantrill and the other guerrilla leaders were taking so long to form their plans, and why they were keeping the men in the dark, he couldn't imagine. There shouldn't be any great planning involved in striking a blow at Lawrence and the Red Legs: Ride in hard, attack the Red Legs' headquarters and the Union garrison like lightning, and then ride out again, pausing long enough to set fire to Jim Lane's house

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to pay him back for the dozens of Missouri houses he'd burned himself.

As for keeping the rank-and-file bushwhackers ignorant . . . well, there were about as many Yankee spies among Quantrill's band as there were fish in the sky. Sam had talked to over a hundred of these men, and all of them had lost property or family to abolitionist raiders of one stripe or another. Sam had even spoken with one man whose brother had been killed by John Brown in 1856, and who still longed for vengeance even though John Brown was now as dead as a rock.

Vengeance could be a long time coming, as Sam well knew. In the two years since Orion's murder, he had yet to kill a single Federal soldier, let alone one of the marauding Kansas Red Legs. It wasn't for lack of trying, though. He had fired countless shots at Bluebellies, but always at a distance or in the dark. He had never hit anything besides trees and the occasional horse.

Sam had a breakfast of fatty bacon with three young brothers who were from Ralls County south of Hannibal and who therefore considered him a kinsman. He ate their food, swapped a few East Missouri stories, and promised to pay them back with bacon of his own as soon as he had some. Then he shouldered his saddlebags again and walked to the camp's makeshift corral to see after his horse, Bixby.

Bixby was a swaybacked roan gelding who had been gelded too late and had a mean disposition as a result. The horse also seemed to think that he knew better than Sam when it came to picking a travel route, or when it came to deciding whether to travel at all. Despite those flaws, however, Sam had no plans to replace Bixby. He thought that he had the horse he deserved.

Sam tried to give Bixby a lump of hard brown sugar from one of his saddlebags, but Bixby ignored it and attempted to bite Sam's shoulder.

"Sometimes I think you forget," Sam said, slapping Bixby on the nose, "that I am the man who freed you from your bondage to an abolitionist."

Bixby snorted and stomped, then tried to bite Sam's shoulder again.

"Clemens!" a voice called.

Sam turned and saw that the voice belonged to one of the Ralls County boys who had fed him breakfast.

"The Colonel wants you at the tent!" the boy shouted.

Sam was astonished. Except for his friendship with Fletch Taylor, he was less than a nobody in the band. Not only was he a new arrival, but it

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was already obvious that he was the worst rider, the worst thief, and the worst shot. Maybe Taylor really had told Todd and Quantrill that he was a Yankee spy.

"Better come quick!" the boy yelled.

Sam waved. "I'll be right — God damn son of a bitch!"

Bixby had succeeded in biting him. Sam whirled and tried to slug the horse in the jaw with the saddlebags, but Bixby jerked his head up and danced away.

Sam rubbed his shoulder and glared at Bixby. "Save some for the Red Legs, why don't you," he said. Then he ducked under the corral rope and hurried to Quantrill's tent. He remembered to remove his hat before going inside.

William Clarke Quantrill leaned back, his left leg crossed over his right, in a polished oak chair behind a table consisting of three planks atop two sawhorses. He wore a white embroidered "guerrilla shirt," yellow breeches, and black cavalry boots. He gave a thin smile as Sam approached the table. Above his narrow upper lip, his mustache was a straight reddish-blond line. His eyelids drooped, but his blue-gray eyes probed Sam with a gaze as piercing as a bayonet. Sam stopped before the table and clenched his muscles so he wouldn't shudder. His own eyes, he had just realized, were of much the same color as Quantrill's.

"You've only been with us since June, Private Clemens," Quantrill said in a flat voice, "and yet it seems that you have distinguished yourself. Corporal Taylor tells me you saved his life a few weeks ago."

Sam looked at Fletch Taylor, who was standing at his left. Taylor appeared uncomfortable under Sam's gaze, so Sam looked past him at some of the other men in the tent. He recognized the guerrilla leaders Bill Gregg and Andy Blunt, but several of the others were strangers to him.

"Well, sir," Sam said to Quantrill, "I don't know that I did. My horse was being cantankerous and brought me in on an abolitionist's house about two hundred feet behind and to one side of Fletch and the other boys, so I happened to see a man hiding up a tree."

"He was aiming a rifle at Corporal Taylor, I understand," Quantrill said.

"Yes, sir, that's how it looked," Sam said. "So I hollered and took a shot at him."

"And that was his undoing."

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Sam twisted the brim of his hat in his hands. "Actually, sir," he said, "I believe that I missed by fourteen or fifteen feet."

Quantrill uncrossed his legs and stood. "But you diverted the ambusher's attention. According to Corporal Taylor, the ambusher then fired four shots at you, one of which took your hat from your head, before he was brought down by a volley from your comrades. Meanwhile you remained steadfast, firing your own weapon without flinching, even though the entire focus of the enemy's fire was at yourself."

Sam licked his lips and said nothing. The truth was that he had been stiff with terror – except for his right hand, which had been cocking and firing the Colt, and his left foot, which had been kicking Bixby in the ribs in an effort to make the horse wheel and run. But Bixby, who seemed to be deaf as far as gunfire was concerned, had been biting a crabapple from a tree and had not cared to move. The horse's position had blocked the other bushwhackers' view of Sam's left foot.

Quantrill put his hands on the table and leaned forward. "That was a brave and noble act, Private Clemens," he said.

A stretch of silence followed until Sam realized that he was expected to say something. "Thank, thank you, Colonel," he stammered. It was well known that Quantrill liked being called "Colonel."

"You understand, of course," Quantrill said, "that in the guerrilla service we have no formal honors. However, as the best reward of service is service itself, I'm promoting you to corporal and ordering you to reconnoiter the enemy in the company of Corporal Taylor."

"And a nigger," someone on Sam's right said. The voice was low, ragged, and angry.

Sam turned toward the voice and saw the most fearsome man he had ever seen in his life. The man wore a Union officer's coat with the insignia torn off, and a low-crowned hat with the brim turned up. His brown hair was long and shaggy, and his beard was the color of dirt. His face was gaunt, and his eyes, small and dark, glowered. He wore a wide-buckled belt with two pistols jammed into it. A scalp hung from the belt on each side of the buckle.

George Todd, standing just behind this man, placed a hand on his shoulder. "I don't much like it either, Bill, but Quantrill's right. A nigger's the perfect spy."

The seated man shook Todd's hand away. "Perfect spy, my hairy ass.

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You can't trust a nigger any more than you can trust Abe Lincoln."

Quantrill looked at the man without blinking. "That concern is why I'm sending two white men as well – one that I trust, and one that he in turn trusts. Don't you agree that two white men can keep one nigger under control, Captain Anderson?"

Anderson met Quantrill's gaze with a glare. "I have three sisters in prison in Kansas City for the simple act of remaining true to their brother's cause," he said. "I do not believe they would care to hear that their brother agreed to send a nigger to fight in that same cause, particularly knowing the treachery of which that race is capable."

Quantrill smiled. "As for sending a nigger to fight, I'm doing no such thing just yet. I'm sending him as a spy and as a guarantee of safe conduct for two brave sons of Missouri. No Kansan is likely to assault white men traveling with a free nigger. As for treachery, well, I assure you that John Noland has proven his loyalty. He's killed six Yankee soldiers and delivered their weapons to me. I trust him as much as I would a good dog, and have no doubt that he will serve Corporals Taylor and Clemens as well as he has me." The Colonel looked about the tent. "Gentlemen, we've been jawing about this enterprise for twenty-four hours. I suggest that it's now time to stop jawing and begin action. If you never risk, you never gain. Are there any objections?"

No one spoke. Anderson spat into the dirt, but then looked at Quantrill and shook his head.

"Very well," said Quantrill. "Captains Anderson and Blunt will please gather your men and communicate with me by messenger when your forces are ready." He nodded to Taylor. "Corporal, you're to return no later than sundown next Monday. So you'd best be on your way."

Sam made a noise in his throat. "Sir? On our way where?"

Quantrill turned to Sam. "Kansas Territory," he said. "Corporal Taylor has the particulars. You're dismissed."

Sam didn't need to be told twice. He left the tent, picked up his saddlebags where he'd dropped them outside, and then ran into the sycamore grove.

Taylor caught up with him in the trees. "You should have saluted, Sam," he said. "It's important to show the Colonel proper respect."

Sam unbuttoned his pants. His head was beginning to ache again. "I have plenty of respect for the Colonel," he said. "I have plenty of respect

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for all of them. If they were to cut me open, I'd probably bleed respect. Now get away and let a man piss in peace."

Taylor sighed. "All right. Get your horse saddled as soon as you can. I'll find Noland and meet you north of the tent. You know Noland?"

"No. But since I've only seen one man of the Negro persuasion in camp, I assume that's him."

"You assume correctly." Taylor started to turn away, then looked back again. "By the way, we were right. We're going to Lawrence. You and I are to count the Bluebellies in the garrison, and –"

"I know what a spy does, Fletch," Sam said.

Taylor turned away. "Hurry up, then. We have some miles to cover." He left the grove.

Sam emptied his bladder and buttoned his pants, then leaned against a tree and retched until he brought up most of the bacon he'd had for breakfast.

"Kansas Territory," Quantrill had said. There had been no sarcasm in his voice. Kansas had been admitted to the Union over two and a half years before, but none of the bushwhackers ever referred to it as a state. In their opinion, its admission to the Union as a free state had been an illegal act forced upon its residents by fanatical jayhawkers. Sooner or later, though, those house-burning, slave-stealing jayhawkers would be crushed, and Kansas Territory would become what it was meant to be: a state governed by Southern men who knew what was right.

To that end, Colonel Quantrill would raid the abolitionist town of Lawrence, the home of Jim Lane and the Kansas Red Legs. And Sam Clemens was to go there first and come back to tell Quantrill how to go about the task.

Orion's ghost, he thought, had better appreciate it.

On Wednesday morning, six miles south of Lawrence on the Paola road, Fletch Taylor started chuckling. Sam, riding in the center, glanced first at him and then at John Noland. Noland didn't even seem to be aware of Sam or Taylor's existence, let alone Taylor's chuckling.

Noland was an enigma, both in his mere presence in Quantrill's band and in his deportment during the present journey. No matter what Sam or Taylor said or did, he continued to look straight ahead, shifting in his saddle only to spit tobacco juice into the road. Except for the color of his

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skin, though, Noland's appearance was like that of any other free man of the border region, right down to the slouch hat and the Colt stuck in his belt. He even rode with the same easy arrogance as Taylor. It was a skill Sam had never mastered.

Sam looked at Taylor again, squinting as he faced the sun. "What's so funny, Fletch?"

Taylor gestured at the winding track of the road. "No pickets," he said. "We ain't seen a Bluebelly since we came into Kansas. If the Colonel wanted to, the whole lot of us could waltz in and raise no more notice than a cottontail rabbit." He chuckled again. "Until we started shooting."

Sam nodded, but didn't laugh. It was true that they hadn't passed a single Federal picket, but that didn't mean Lawrence was going to be a waltz. The absence of pickets might only mean that the town had fortified itself so well that it didn't need them.

"You should carry your gun in your belt," Noland said. His voice was a rumble.

Sam was startled. Until now, Noland hadn't spoken at all.

"Are you addressing me?" Sam asked, turning back toward Noland. But he knew that must be the case. Both Noland and Taylor had their pistols in their belts, while Sam's was in one of his saddlebags.

Noland looked straight ahead. "That's right."

"I thought I should make sure," Sam said, "since you won't look me in the eye."

"Your eyes ain't pleasant to look at," Noland said.

Taylor chortled. "Whomp him, Sam. Make him say your eyes are the most beautiful jewels this side of a St. Louie whorehouse."

"It ain't a question of beauty," Noland said. "It's a question of skittishness. Mr. Clemens has skittish eyes. I prefer steady ones, like those of Colonel Quantrill. Or like your own, Mister Taylor."

Now Sam laughed. "It appears that you've bested me in the enticing eyeball category, Fletch. Perhaps we should switch places so you can ride next to John here."

Taylor scowled. "Ain't funny, Sam."

Sam knew when to stop joking with Fletch Taylor, so he replied to Noland instead. "My gun's fine where it is," he said. "Why should I put it in my belt and risk shooting myself in the leg?"

"If that's your worry, you can take out the caps," Noland said. "But it'll

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look better going into Lawrence if your gun's in the open. The county sheriff might be inspecting strangers, and he won't think nothing of it if your pistol's in your belt. But if he finds it in your bag, he'll think you're trying to hide it."

Sam didn't know whether Noland was right or not, but it wasn't worth arguing about. He took his pistol from his saddlebag, removed the caps, and tucked the weapon into his belt.

"Be sure to replace those caps when we come back this way with the Colonel," Taylor said. He sounded disgusted.

"I merely want to ensure that I don't shoot up the city of Lawrence prematurely," Sam said. But neither Taylor nor Noland laughed. Sam gave Bixby a pat on the neck, and Bixby looked back at him and snorted.

When the three bushwhackers were within a mile of Lawrence, they encountered two riders heading in the opposite direction. The two men, one old and one young, were dressed in high-collared shirts and black suits despite the August heat. They wore flat-brimmed black hats, and their pistols hung in black holsters at their sides. The younger man held a Bible with a black leather cover, reading aloud as he rode.

"Well, lookee here," Taylor whispered as the two approached. "I think we got ourselves a couple of abolitionist preachers on our hands."

Sam tensed. If there was one thing a bushwhacker hated more than an abolitionist, it was an abolitionist with a congregation. Taylor had particularly strong feelings in this regard, and Sam feared that his friend might forget that they were only in Kansas as spies for now.

"Good morning, friends," the elder preacher said, reining his horse to a stop. The younger man closed his Bible and stopped his horse as well. They blocked the road.

"Good morning to you as well," Taylor replied. He and Noland stopped their horses a few yards short of the preachers.

Sam tried to stop Bixby too, but Bixby ignored the reins and continued ahead, trying to squeeze between the horses blocking the way. The preachers moved their mounts closer together, forcing Bixby to halt, and the roan shook his head and gave an irritated *whuff*.

"I apologize, gentlemen," Sam said. "My horse sometimes forgets which of us was made in God's image."

The elder preacher frowned. "More discipline might be in order," he said, and then looked past Sam at Taylor. "Are you going into Lawrence?"

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"That we are," said Taylor. His voice had taken on a gravelly tone that Sam recognized as trouble on the way. He glanced back and saw that Taylor's right hand was hovering near the butt of his pistol.

"I see that you are traveling with a colored companion," the younger preacher said. "Is he your servant?"

"No," Sam said before Taylor could reply. "My friend and I jayhawked him from Arkansas three years ago, and we've been trying to help him find his family ever since. Are there any colored folks named Smith in Lawrence?"

The elder preacher nodded. "A number, I believe." He twitched his reins, and his horse moved to the side of the road. "I would like to help you in your search, gentlemen, but my son and I are on our way to Baldwin to assist in a few overdue baptisms. Sometimes an older child resists immersion and must be held down."

"I have observed as much myself," Sam said as the elder preacher rode past.

The younger preacher nodded to Sam and thumped his Bible with his fingertips. "If you gentlemen will be in town through the Sabbath, I would like to invite you to attend worship at First Lawrence Methodist."

Taylor came up beside Sam. "I doubt we'll be in town that long, preacher," he said. "But we'll be sure to pay your church a visit the next time we pass through."

"I am glad to hear it," the young preacher said. "God bless you, gentlemen." He nudged his horse with his heels and set off after his father.

Taylor looked over his shoulder at the departing men. "You won't be so glad when it happens," he muttered.

Noland rode up. "'Jayhawked from Arkansas,'" he said. "That's a good one." He spurred his horse, which set off at a trot. Taylor's horse did likewise. Bixby, for once, took the cue and hurried to catch up.

"I'm sorry if my lie didn't meet with your approval," Sam said as Bixby drew alongside Noland's horse.

"I said it was a good one," Noland said. "I say what I mean."

"You may believe him on that score, Sam," Taylor said. "John's as honest a nigger as I've ever known."

Sam eyed Noland. "Well, then, tell me," he said. "Where *were* you jayhawked from?"

"I was born a free man in Ohio," Noland said. "Same as Colonel

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Quantrill."

"I see," Sam said. "And how is it that a free man of your race rides with a free man like the Colonel?"

Noland turned to look at Sam for the first time. His eyes and face were like black stone.

"He pays me," Noland said.

Sam had no response to that. But Noland kept looking at him.

"So why do *you* ride with the Colonel?" Noland asked.

"Might as well ask Fletch the same question," Sam said..

"I know all about Mister Taylor," Noland said. "His house was burned, his property stolen. But I don't know shit about you."

Taylor gave Noland a look of warning. "Don't get uppity."

"It's all right, Fletch," Sam said. Fair was fair. He had asked Noland an impertinent question, so Noland had asked him one. "I was a steamboat pilot on the Mississippi, Mister Noland. I was a printer's devil before that, but I wanted to be on the river, so I made it so." He grimaced. "I was a cub for two years before I earned my license, and I was only able to follow the profession for another two years before the war started. I had to leave the river then, or be forced to pilot a Union boat. So here I am."

"How'd you come to be on this side of Missouri instead of that side?" Noland asked.

"I was going to Nevada Territory with my brother," Sam said, angry now at being prodded, "but the Red Legs killed him northwest of Atchison. I went back home after that, but eventually realized there was nothing useful I could do there. So I came back this way and fell in with one bunch of incompetents after another until I joined the Colonel." He glared at Noland. "*So here I am.*"

"So here you are," Noland said.

"That's about enough, John," Taylor said. He looked at Sam. "I didn't know you were a printer, Sam, but I'm glad to hear it. It'll make one of our tasks easier. Marshal Donaldson's posse tore up the Lawrence *Herald of Freedom's* press and dumped the type in the Kansas River back in '56, but the Lawrence *Journal*'s sprung up like a weed to take its place. So when we raid Lawrence, the *Journal*'s to be destroyed. But we'll need to know how well the office is armed, so I suggest that you go there and ask for employment. You'll be able to get a look at things without them wondering why. After you've done that, you can help me count Bluebellies, Red

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Legs, and Lawrence Home Guards, if we can find out who they are."

"What if the *Journal* wants to hire me?" Sam asked.

Taylor grinned. "Tell them you'll be back in a week or so." He looked across at Noland. "John, you're to fall in with the local niggers and see whether any of them have guns. You might also ask them about Jim Lane, since they love him so much. Find out where his fancy new house is, and how often he's there."

Noland was staring straight ahead again, but he nodded.

They were now skirting the base of a high, steep hill. Sam looked up the slope. "One of the boys at Blue Springs told me that the hill rising over Lawrence is called Mount Horeb," he said. "It must be named after the place where Moses saw the burning bush."

Taylor chuckled. "If Moses is still here, he'll see more burning before long, at closer range than he might like." He pointed toward the southeast, at another hill that was a few miles distant. "That might be a safer place for him to watch from. The Colonel says it'll be our last stop before the raid, so we can see what's what before it's too late to turn back." He spurred his horse, which galloped ahead. "Come on, boys! We've reached Lawrence!"

Noland spurred his horse as well, and he and Taylor vanished around the curve of the hill.

"Now that I think of it," Sam yelled after them, "he said Mount Oread, not Horeb. Moses doesn't have anything to do with it."

He kicked Bixby, but the horse only looked back at him and gave a low nicker. It was the saddest sound Sam had ever heard.

"Do you have a stomachache?" he asked.

Bixby looked forward again and plodded as if leading a funeral procession. Sam kicked the horse once more and then gave up. The sadness of Bixby's nicker had infected him, and he felt oppressed by the heat, by his companions, and by his very existence on the planet.

They followed the road around the hill, and then Lawrence lay before Sam like a toy city put together by a giant child. Its rows of stores and houses were too neat and perfect to be real. Small wagons rolled back and forth between them, and children dashed about like scurrying ants. Taylor and Noland were already among them.

Sam closed his eyes, but then opened them immediately, crying out before he could stop himself.

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He had just seen the buildings, wagons, and children burst into flame.

Sam shook himself. Here he was having nightmares while wide awake. The ride had been too long, the sun too hot. It was time for a rest.

But maybe not for sleep.

EARLY FRIDAY, Sam awoke in sweat-soaked sheets. He fought his way free, then sat up with his back against the wall. He had just spent his second night in Lawrence, and his second night in a real bed in almost three months. The dream had come to him on both nights, worse than ever. He was no more rested than if he had run up and down Mount Oread since sundown.

The dream always began the same way: He and the other Marion Rangers, fifteen men in all, were bedding down in a corn crib at Camp Ralls, fourteen miles south of Hannibal. They had to chase the rats away, but they had to do that every night. Then a Negro messenger came and told them that the enemy was nearby. They scoffed; they had heard that before.

But they grew tense and restless, and could not sleep. The sounds of their breathing were unsteady. Sam's heart began to beat faster.

Then they heard a horse approaching. Sam and the other Rangers went to the corn crib's front wall and peered out through a crack between the logs. In the dim moonlight, they saw the shadow of a man on a horse enter the camp. Sam was sure that he saw more men and horses behind that shadow. Camp Ralls was being attacked.

Sam picked up a rifle and pushed its muzzle between the logs. His skull was humming, his chest tight. His hands shook. The enemy had come and would kill him. The enemy had come and would kill him. The enemy had come and would—

Someone shouted, "Fire!"

And Sam pulled the trigger. The noise was as loud and the flash as bright as if a hundred guns had gone off at once.

The enemy fell from his saddle and lay on the ground. Then all was darkness, and silence. There was nothing but the smell of damp earth.

No more riders came. The fallen man was alone.

Sam and the others went out to the enemy. Sam turned the man onto his back, and the moonlight revealed that he was not wearing a uniform, and that his white shirt was soaked with blood. He was not the enemy. He was not even armed. And his face –

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Was sometimes Henry's, and sometimes Orion's.

But just now, this Friday morning in Lawrence, it had been someone else's. It had been a face that Sam did not recognize. It had been the face of an innocent stranger, killed by Sam Clemens for no reason at all . . . no reason save that Sam was at war, and the man had gotten in the way.

Fletch Taylor, in the room's other bed, mumbled in his sleep. Sam could still smell the whiskey. One of Taylor's first acts of spying on Wednesday afternoon had been to hunt up a brothel, and he had been having a fine time ever since. He was counting Bluebellies too, but it had turned out that there weren't many Bluebellies to count.

Sam had visited the brothel with Taylor on Wednesday, but hadn't found the girls to his liking. So he'd spent most of his time since then trying to do his job. He had applied for work at the Lawrence *Journal*, as planned, and had been turned down, as he'd hoped – but had learned that the *Journal* was a two-man, one-boy operation, and that they didn't even dream of being attacked. A carbine hung on pegs on the wall in the pressroom, but it was kept unloaded to prevent the boy from shooting rabbits out the back door. The *Journal*'s type would join the *Herald of Freedom*'s at the bottom of the Kansas River with little difficulty.

From the purplish-gray color of the patch of eastern sky visible through the hotel room window, Sam guessed that it was about five A.M. He climbed out of bed and went to the window to look down at the wide, muddy strip of the town's main thoroughfare, Massachusetts Street. Lawrence was quiet. The buildings were closed up, and no one was outside. Even the Red Legs and Home Guards slept until six or six-thirty. If Colonel Quantrill timed his raid properly, he and his bushwhackers could ride into Lawrence while its citizens were still abed.

The Union garrison shouldn't be much trouble either, Sam thought as he looked north toward the river. The handful of troops stationed in Lawrence had moved their main camp to the north bank of the Kansas, and the only way for them to come back across into town was by ferry, a few at a time. Two small camps of Federal recruits – one for whites, the other for Negroes – were located south of the river, in town; but those recruits were green and poorly armed. The raiders could ignore them, or squash them like ladybugs if they were foolish enough to offer resistance.

Sam left the window, pulled the chamber pot from under his bed, and took a piss. Then he lit an oil lamp, poured water from a pitcher into a bowl,

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and stood before the mirror that hung beside the window. He took his razor and scraped the stubble from his throat, chin, cheeks, and sideburns, but left his thick reddish-brown mustache. He had grown fond of the mustache because it made him look meaner than he really was. The dirt that had been ground into his pores had made him look mean too, but that was gone now. He'd had a bath Wednesday evening, and was thinking of having another one today. Lawrence might be a den of abolitionist murderers, but at least it was a den of abolitionist murderers that could provide a few of the amenities of civilization.

When he had finished shaving, he combed his hair and dressed, then put out the lamp and left the room. Taylor was still snoring. Whiskey did wonders for helping a man catch up on his sleep.

Sam went downstairs and out to the street, opening and closing the door of the Whitney House as quietly as possible so as not to disturb the Stone family, who owned the place. Taylor had told Sam that Colonel Quantrill had stayed at the Whitney when he'd lived in Lawrence under the name of Charley Hart, and that Mr. Stone had befriended "Hart" and would therefore be treated with courtesy during the raid. So Sam was being careful not to do anything that might be interpreted as discourtesy. He wanted to stay on the Colonel's good side.

The wooden sidewalk creaked under Sam's boots as he walked toward the river. It was a sound that he hadn't noticed on Wednesday or Thursday, when he had shared the sidewalk with dozens of Lawrence citizens. Then, the predominant sounds had been of conversation and laughter, intermingled with the occasional neighing of a horse. But this early in the morning, Sam had Massachusetts Street to himself, save for two dogs that raced past with butcher-bones in their mouths. Sam took a cigar from his coat pocket, lit it with a match, and drew in a lungful of sweet smoke.

He had to admit that Lawrence was a nice-looking town. Most of the buildings were sturdy and clean, and the town was large and prosperous considering that it had been in existence less than ten years. Almost three thousand souls called Lawrence home, and not all of those souls, Sam was sure, were bad ones. Perhaps the raid would succeed in running off those who were, and the city would be improved as a result.

Sam paused before the Eldridge House hotel. The original Eldridge House, a veritable fortress of abolitionist fervor and free-state propaganda, had been destroyed by Marshal Donaldson in 1856, but it had been rebuilt

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into an even more formidable fortress in the service of the same things. It was a brick building four stories high, with iron grilles over the ground-floor windows. Quantrill might want to destroy the Eldridge House a second time, particularly since the Lawrence Home Guards would probably concentrate their resistance here, but Sam's advice would be to skip it. A mere fifteen or twenty men, armed with Sharps carbines and barricaded in the Eldridge House, would be able to kill a hundred bushwhackers in the street below.

"Hello!" a shrill voice called from across the street. "Good morning, Mister Sir!"

Sam looked across and saw a sandy-haired boy of ten or eleven waving at him. It took a moment before he recognized the boy as the printer's devil from the Lawrence *Journal.*

Sam took his cigar from his mouth. "Good morning yourself," he said without shouting.

The boy pointed at the Eldridge House. "Are you staying there, Mister Sir?" he yelled. "You must be rich!"

Sam shook his head. "Neither one. But if you keep squawking like a rusty steamboat whistle, I imagine you'll be meeting some of the inhabitants of the Eldridge House presently." He continued up the street.

The boy ran across and joined Sam on the sidewalk. Sam frowned at him and blew smoke at his face, but the boy only breathed it in and began chattering.

"I like the morning before the sun comes up, don't you?" the boy said. "Some days I wake up when it's still dark, and I ride my pa's mule out to the hills south of town, and I can look down over Lawrence when the sun rises. It makes me feel like the king of the world. Do you know what I mean, Mister Sir?"

"I'm sure I don't," Sam said.

The boy didn't seem to notice that Sam had spoken. "Say, if you aren't at the Eldridge, where are you at, Mister Sir? I'll bet you're at the Johnson House, is what I'll bet. But maybe not, because the Red Legs meet at the Johnson, and they don't like strangers. So I'll bet you're at the Whitney, then, aren't you, Mister Sir?"

"Yes," Sam said. "The Johnson was not much to my liking."

"The Red Legs seem to like it just fine."

Sam nodded."I have made note of that." And indeed he had. If the Red

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Legs could be punished for their crimes, he would be able to sleep a little better. And if the specific Red Legs who had killed Orion could be found and strung up, he would sleep better than Adam before the Fall.

"Those Red Legs, they have a time," the boy said. "I just might be a Red Leg myself, when I'm old enough."

"I would advise against it," Sam said, gnawing on his cigar. "The profession has little future."

The boy kicked a rock off the sidewalk. "I guess not," he said. "They say they'll have burned out the secesh in another year, so there won't be nothing left to fight for, will there, Mister Sir?"

"Stop calling me 'Mister Sir,'" Sam said. "If you must speak to me at all, call me Mister Clemens." He saw no danger in using his real name. The self-satisfied citizens of Lawrence clearly didn't expect bushwhackers in their midst, and wouldn't know that he was one even if they did.

"I'm sorry, Mister Clemens," the boy said. "I listened to you talking to Mister Trask at the *Journal* yesterday, but I didn't hear your name. Would you like to know mine?"

"No," Sam said.

They had reached the northern end of Massachusetts Street and were now walking down a rutted slope toward the ferry landing. Before them, the Kansas River was dull brown in color and less than a hundred yards wide; hardly a river at all, in Sam's opinion. But it would be enough to protect Quantrill's raiders from the soldiers on the far bank, provided that the soldiers didn't realize the raiders were coming until it was too late. To assure himself of that, Sam wanted to see how active or inactive the Bluebellies were at this time of morning. If they were as slumberous as Lawrence's civilians, he would be able to report that there was little chance of any of them ferrying across in time to hinder the raid. There weren't many soldiers in the camp anyway. Taylor had counted only a hundred and twelve, and some of those weren't soldiers at all, but surveyors.

"How come you're heading down to the river, Mister Clemens?" the boy asked. "Are you going fishing?"

Sam stopped walking and glared down at the boy, taking his cigar from his mouth with a slow, deliberate motion. "Do you see a fishing pole in my hand, boy?" he asked, exhaling a bluish cloud.

The boy gazed up at the cigar, which had a two-inch length of ash trembling at its tip.

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"No, sir," the boy said. "I see a cigar."

"Then it is reasonable to assume," Sam said, "that I have come to the river not to fish, but to smoke." He tapped the cigar, and the ash fell onto the boy's head.

The boy yelped and jumped away, slapping at his hair.

Sam replaced his cigar between his teeth and continued down the slope.

"That wasn't nice!" the boy shouted after him.

"I'm not a nice man," Sam said. He didn't look back, so he didn't know if the boy heard him. But he reached the riverbank alone.

A thin fog hovered over the water and began to dissipate as the sun rose. The sunlight gave the tents on the far bank a pinkish tinge. The camp wasn't dead quiet, but there wasn't much activity either. At first, Sam saw only two fires and no more than five or six men up and about. As he watched, more men emerged from their tents, but military discipline was lacking. Apparently, these Bluebellies could get up whenever they pleased. That would be good news for the Colonel.

Sam threw the stub of his cigar into the river and heard it hiss. The sun was up now, and the soldiers began emerging from their tents with increasing frequency. From old habit, Sam reached for his pocket watch. But he still hadn't replaced the one that the Red Legs had stolen two years before.

He heard a scuffing sound behind him and looked over his shoulder. The boy from the *Journal* was close by again, twisting the toe of his shoe in the dirt.

"Say, boy," Sam said, "do you have a watch?"

The boy gave Sam a look of calculated contempt. "Of course I have a watch. Mister Trask gave me his old one. I got to get to the paper on time, don't I?"

"Well, tell me what time it is," Sam said.

"Why should I tell anything to someone who dumped a pound of burning tobacco on my head?"

Sam grinned. The boy was starting to remind him of the boys he had grown up with in Hannibal. "Maybe I'd give a cigar to someone who told me the time."

The boy's expression changed. "Really?"

"I said maybe."

The boy reached into a pocket and pulled out a battered timepiece. He

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peered at it and said, "This has six o'clock, but it loses thirty-five minutes a day and I ain't set it since yesterday noon. So it might be about half-past."

Sam took a cigar from his coat and tossed it to the boy. "Much obliged, boy."

The boy caught the cigar with his free hand, then replaced his watch in his pocket and gave Sam another look of contempt. "Stop calling me 'boy,'" he said. "If you must speak to me at all, call me Henry." The boy jammed the cigar into his mouth, turned, and strode up the slope to Massachusetts Street.

Sam turned back to the river. The fog was gone, and most of the soldiers were out of their tents. To be on the safe side, Sam decided, the raid would have to begin no later than five-thirty, and a detachment of bushwhackers would have to come to the river to train their guns on the ferry, just in case. He didn't think he would have any trouble persuading Colonel Quantrill to see the wisdom in that.

He started back up the slope, but paused where the boy from the *Journal* had stood.

"Henry," Sam murmured. "God damn."

Then he went up to the street and walked to the livery stable to check on Bixby. Bixby was in a foul mood and tried to bite him, so Sam knew that the horse was fine.

THAT EVENING, Sam was in his and Taylor's room at the Whitney House, writing down what he had learned so far, when he heard the *Journal* boy's voice outside. He went to the open window, looked down, and saw the boy astride a brown mule that was festooned with bundles of newspapers. The boy dropped one of the bundles at the Whitney's door, then looked up and saw Sam at the window.

The boy shook his finger at Sam. "That seegar was spoiled, Mister Clemens!" he shouted. "I was sick all afternoon, but Mister Trask made me work anyway!"

"Good," Sam said. "It builds character."

The boy gave Sam yet another contemptuous look, then kicked the mule and proceeded down the street.

As the boy left, four men wearing blue shirts and red leather leggings rode past going the other way. They all carried pistols in hip holsters, and one had a rifle slung across his back. They were unshaven and ugly, and

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they laughed and roared as they rode up Massachusetts Street. They would no doubt cross the river and make trouble for someone north of town tonight. Sam didn't recognize any of them, but that didn't matter. They were Kansas Red Legs, meaner and more murderous than even Jennison's Jayhawkers had been; and if they themselves hadn't killed Orion, they were acquainted with the men who had.

"Whoop it up, boys," Sam muttered as they rode away. "Whoop it up while you can."

He came away from the window and saw that Taylor was awake. Taylor had gotten up in the afternoon to meet with Noland, but then had gone back to bed.

"What's all the noise?" Taylor asked.

"Newspapers," Sam said. "I'll get one."

Taylor sneered. "Why? It's all abolitionist lies anyway."

But when Sam brought a copy of the *Journal* back upstairs and began reading, he found news. Horrifying, sickening news.

"Sons of bitches," he whispered.

"What is it?" Taylor asked. He was at the mirror, shaving, preparing for another night out in Lawrence's less respectable quarter.

"A building in Kansas City collapsed yesterday," Sam said.

"Well, good."

Sam shook his head. "No, Fletch. It was the building on Grand Avenue where the Bluebellies were holding the women they suspected of aiding bushwhackers. The paper says four women were killed, and several others hurt."

Taylor stopped shaving. "That's where they were keeping Bloody Bill Anderson's sisters," he said. "Cole Younger and Johnny McCorkle had kin there too. Does the paper give names?"

"No. But of course it suggests that the collapse might have been caused by a charge set by guerrillas 'in a disastrous attempt to remove the ladies from Federal protection.'"

Taylor's upper lip curled back. "As if Southern men would endanger their women!" He shook his razor at the newspaper. "I'll tell you what, though. I was worrying that the Colonel might have trouble riling up some of the boys for this raid, especially since Noland has found out that Jim Lane's out of town. But this news will rile them like nobody's business. And if Bill Anderson's sisters have been hurt, you can bet that he and *his*

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# The jug-eared man pulled a revolver from his belt and pointed it at Orion.

boys will shit blue fire. God help any Unionists who cross their path." He dipped his razor in the bowl and turned back to the mirror. His eyes were bright. "Or mine, for that matter."

When Taylor had finished shaving, he asked if Sam would like to go out and have a time. Sam declined, and Taylor left without him.

Then Sam read the rest of the newspaper, most of which he found to be worthless. But he admired the typesetting. There were few mistakes, and most of the lines were evenly spaced and straight. He wondered how many of them the boy had set.

He put the newspaper aside and wrote in his journal until the evening light failed. Then he undressed and got into bed, but lay awake for so long that he almost decided to join Taylor after all. But he had no enthusiasm for the idea. Spy-work wasn't physically strenuous, but it took a lot out of him mentally.

When he finally fell asleep, he dreamed that he was a printer's devil for Orion again. This time, though, their newspaper was not the Hannibal *Journal*, but the Lawrence *Journal*.

He was setting type about a fire in which over a hundred and fifty people had been killed, when a man burst into the pressroom. The man was jug-eared, greasy-haired, narrow-faced, and beardless. His thick lips parted to reveal crooked, stained teeth. Sam had never seen him before.

The jug-eared man pulled a revolver from his belt and pointed it at Orion.

"Henry!" Orion shouted. "Run!"

Sam, his ink-smeared hands hanging useless at his sides, said, "But I'm Sam."

The jug-eared man shot Orion, who shriveled like a dying vine.

Then the stranger pointed his revolver at Sam. Sam tried to turn and run, but his feet were stuck as if in thick mud.

The revolver fired with a sound like a cannon going off in a church, and the jug-eared man laughed.

Then Sam was floating near the ceiling, looking down at two bleeding bodies. Orion's face had become that of Josiah Trask, one of the editors of

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the Lawrence *Journal*. And Sam's face had become that of the boy, Henry, to whom he had given a cigar. The cigar was still in Henry's mouth.

Sam awoke crouched against the wall. He was dripping with sweat.

Night had fallen, and Lawrence was quiet. Taylor had not yet returned to the room. Sam crept away from the wall and sat on the edge of the bed, shivering.

"Henry," he whispered. "God damn."

At noon on Wednesday, August 19, Sam and Taylor were sitting on a log in southern Jackson County near the village of Lone Jack, in the midst of their fellow bushwhackers. They and Noland had returned to the Blue Springs camp two days before, and Colonel Quantrill had received their report with satisfaction. Then, on Tuesday morning, Quantrill had ordered his guerrillas to move out without telling them their objective. In order to fool any Federal scouts or pickets that might spot them, the Colonel had marched the bushwhackers eastward for several miles before cutting back to the southwest. En route, the band had been joined by Bill Anderson with forty men and Andy Blunt with over a hundred, almost doubling the size of Quantrill's force.

The men all knew something big was at hand. And now, finally, the Colonel was going to tell them what. Sam thought it was about time.

Quantrill, flanked by George Todd and Bill Anderson, sat before the bushwhackers astride his one-eyed mare, Black Bess, and gave a screeching yell. Over three hundred voices responded, and a thrill ran up Sam's spine. The sound was both the most magnificent and most terrifying thing he had ever heard. If he were the enemy and heard that sound, he would be halfway to Colorado before the echo came back from the nearest hill.

The Colonel nodded in satisfaction. He was wearing a slouch hat with one side of the brim pinned up by a silver star, a loose gray guerrilla shirt with blue and silver embroidery, and gray trousers tucked into his cavalry boots. His belt bristled with four Colt pistols, and two more hung from holsters on either side of his saddle.

"Well, boys," Quantrill shouted, "I hope you ain't tired of riding just yet!"

He was answered by a loud, ragged chorus of "Hell, no!"

Quantrill laughed. "That's good," he cried, "because come nightfall, we're heading for Kansas Territory to see if we can pull its most rotten

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tooth: Lawrence!"

A moment of silence followed the announcement, and for that moment Sam wondered if the men had decided that the Colonel was out of his mind. But then the bushwhackers exploded into another shrieking cheer, and at least a hundred of them rose to their feet and fired pistols into the air.

Taylor clapped Sam on the shoulder. "Are these the best damn boys in Missouri, or ain't they!" he yelled.

"They're sure the loudest," Sam said.

Quantrill raised a hand, and the cheers subsided.

"Save your ammunition," the Colonel shouted. "You've worked hard to make it or steal it, so don't waste it shooting at God. There are plenty of better targets where we're going!"

Another cheer rose up at that, but then Quantrill's expression changed from one of glee to one of cold, deadly intent. The bushwhackers fell silent.

"Boys," Quantrill said, no longer shouting, "there's more danger ahead than any of us have faced before. There could be Federals both behind and in front of us, coming and going. Now, we sent some men to spy on Lawrence, and they say the town's ripe to be taken – but there might be pickets on the way there. So we could have General Ewing's Bluebellies down on us from Kansas City, and some from Leavenworth as well. I doubt that we'll all make it back to Missouri alive." He straightened in his saddle, and it seemed to Sam that his metallic gaze fell on each bushwhacker in turn. "So if there's any man who doesn't want to go into the Territory with the rest of us, now's your chance to head for home. After we leave here tonight, there will be no turning back. Not for anyone."

Beside Quantrill, Bill Anderson drew a pistol. Anderson's hair was even wilder than it had been when Sam had seen him in Quantrill's tent the week before, and his eyes were so fierce that they didn't look human. "Anyone who *does* turn back after we've started," Anderson cried, "will wish to God he'd been taken by the Yankees before I'm through with him!"

Taylor leaned close to Sam and whispered, "I think Bloody Bill's heard about the building in Kansas City."

Sam thought so too. In the face of Bill Anderson he saw a hatred that had become so pure that if Anderson ever ran out of enemies against whom to direct his rage, he would have to invent more.

"But although we'll be going through hardships," Quantrill continued, "the result will be worth it. Lawrence is the hotbed of abolitionism in

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Kansas, and most of the property stolen from Missouri can be found there, ready and waiting to be taken back by Missourians. Even if Jim Lane ain't home, his house and his plunder are. We can work more justice in Lawrence than anywhere else in five hundred miles! So who's going with me?"

The shrill cheer rose up a fourth time, and all of the men not already standing came to their feet. Despite Quantrill's warning to save ammunition, more shots were fired into the air.

Quantrill and his captains wheeled their horses and rode to their tent, and Sam left Taylor and went to the tree where he had tied Bixby. There, after avoiding Bixby's attempts to bite him, he opened one of his saddlebags, took out his revolver, and replaced its caps.

When he looked up again, he saw John Noland leaning against the tree, regarding him with casual disdain.

"Ain't gonna shoot something, are you, Mister Clemens?" Noland asked.

"I'll do my best if it becomes necessary," Sam said.

Noland gave a sardonic grunt. "'If it becomes necessary,'" he repeated. "Why do you think we're goin' where we're goin'?"

"I should think that would be obvious," Sam said. "To retrieve that which belongs to Missouri, and to punish the jayhawkers and Red Legs who stole it."

"You'll know a jayhawker on sight, will you?" Noland asked.

"I'll know the Red Legs on sight, I'll tell you that."

Noland pushed away from the tree. "I reckon you will, if they sleep in their pants." He sauntered past Sam and tipped his hat. "Hooray for you, Mister Clemens. Hooray for us all."

"You don't sound too all-fired excited, Noland," Sam said.

Noland looked back with a grim smile. "You want to see me excited, Mister Clemens, you watch me get some of that free-soil money into my pocket. You watch me then." He tipped his hat again and walked away.

Sam watched him go. How, he wondered, could two men as different as Bill Anderson and John Noland be riding in the same guerrilla band on the same raid?

Then he looked down at the gun in his hand and remembered that he was riding with both of them.

Bixby nipped his arm. Sam jumped and cursed, then replaced his revolver in the saddlebag and gave Bixby a lump of sugar. The horse would soon need all the energy it could get.

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At dusk, the Colonel had the bushwhackers mount up and proceed toward the southwest. Only thirteen men had left the raiders after Quantrill's announcement of the target, and only two of those had been members of Quantrill's own band. Sam marveled. Here were more than three hundred men going to what might be their deaths, just because one man had asked them to do so. True, each man had his own reasons for becoming a bushwhacker in the first place, but none of them would have dreamed of attempting a raid so far into Kansas if Quantrill had not offered to lead them in it.

In the middle of the night, the guerrillas happened upon a force of over a hundred Confederate recruits under the command of a Colonel John Holt. Holt and Quantrill conferred for an hour while the bushwhackers rested their horses, and when the guerrillas resumed their advance, Holt and his recruits joined them.

At daybreak on Thursday, August 20, Quantrill's raiders made camp beside the Grand River. They were only four miles from the border now, and this would be their final rest before the drive toward Lawrence. Late in the morning, fifty more men from Cass and Bates counties rode into the camp and offered their services. Quantrill accepted, and by Sam's count, the invasion force now consisted of almost five hundred men, each one mounted on a strong horse and armed with at least one pistol and as much ammunition as he could carry. A few of the men also had rifles, and many carried bundles of pitch-dipped torches.

If Federal troops did attack them, Sam thought, the Bluebellies would get one hell of a fight for their trouble. They might also become confused about who was friend and who was foe, because almost two hundred of the bushwhackers were wearing parts of blue Union uniforms.

At mid-afternoon, Captain Todd rode among the dozing men and horses, shouting, "Saddle up, boys! Lawrence ain't gonna plunder itself, now, is it?"

The men responded with a ragged cheer. Sam got up, rolled his blanket, and then carried it and his saddle to the dead tree where Taylor's horse and Bixby were tied. He had spread his blanket in a shady spot and had tried to sleep, but had only managed to doze a little. Taylor, lying a few yards away, had started snoring at noon and hadn't stopped until Todd had ridden past.

"How you could sleep with what we've got ahead of us, I can't imagine,"

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Sam said as Taylor came up to saddle his horse.

"I wasn't sleeping," Taylor said. "I was thinking over strategy."

"With help from the hive of bumblebees you swallowed, no doubt."

Taylor grinned. "We're gonna be fine, Sam," he said. "You know they ain't expecting us. So there's no need for a man to be afraid."

"No, I suppose not," Sam said. "Not unless a man has a brain."

Taylor frowned. "What's that supposed to mean?"

Sam took his Colt from his saddlebag and stuck it into his belt. "Nothing, Fletch. I just want to get there, get it done, and get back, is all."

"You and me and everybody else," Taylor said.

As Sam and Taylor mounted their horses, a cluster of eleven men rode past, yipping and laughing. They seemed eager to be at the head of the bushwhacker force as it entered Kansas.

The man leading the cluster was jug-eared, greasy-haired, narrow-faced, and beardless.

Sam's heart turned to ice. Slowly, he raised his arm and pointed at the cluster of men. "Who are they?" he asked. His throat was tight and dry.

"Some of Anderson's boys," Taylor said. "Full of piss and vinegar, ain't they?"

"Do you know the one in front?" Sam asked.

"Sure do," Taylor said. "I've even ridden with him a time or two. Name's Frank James. You can count on him in a fight, that's for sure." Taylor clicked his tongue, and his horse started after the cluster of Anderson's men.

Bixby followed Taylor's horse while Sam stared ahead at the man from his dream. The man who had entered the *Journal* pressroom, killed an unarmed man and boy, and then laughed.

At six o'clock, Quantrill's raiders crossed the border into Kansas.

Ahead, the Territory grew dark.

By eleven o'clock, when the raiders passed the town of Gardner, the moonless night was as black as Quantrill's horse. Gullies, creeks, and fences became obstacles, and some of the bushwhackers wanted to light torches to help them find their way. But Quantrill would not allow that. They were still over twenty miles from Lawrence, in open country, and could not afford to be spotted from a distance. Besides, the torches were supposed to be reserved for use in Lawrence itself.

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Soon after midnight, Quantrill halted the bushwhackers near a farmhouse, and the word was passed back along the column for the men to keep quiet.

"What are we stopping here for?" Sam whispered. He and Taylor were riding near the middle of the column, and Sam couldn't see what was happening up front.

"Shush yourself," Taylor hissed.

A minute later, there was a yell from the farmhouse, and then laughter from some of the raiders.

The tall form of Captain Bill Gregg came riding back along the column. "All right, boys, we can travel on," he said. "We got ourselves a friendly Kansan to guide us!" He wheeled his horse and returned to the head of the column.

"Wonder what he means by that," Sam said.

Taylor chuckled. "What do you think?"

The bushwhackers started moving again and made rapid progress for a few miles, zigzagging around obstacles. Then Quantrill called another halt. The men began muttering, but fell silent as a pistol was fired.

Bixby jerked his head and shied away from the column. Sam had to fight to bring the horse back into place. "What in blazes is the matter with you?" he asked. Bixby had never been spooked by gunfire before. In fact, he had hardly noticed it. "It was just somebody's pistol going off by mistake!"

At that moment, Captain Gregg came riding by again. "No mistake about it," he said, pausing beside Sam and Taylor. "Our friendly Kansan claimed he didn't know which side of yonder hill we should go around. So the Colonel dispatched him to a hill of his own, and we're to wait until we have another friendly Kansan to guide us. There's a house ahead, and some of Anderson's boys are going to see who's home. We'll be on our way again before long." Gregg spurred his horse and continued back along the column to spread the word.

"Well, good for the Colonel," Taylor said. "Now that Kansan is as friendly to us as a Kansan can be."

Sam was stunned. When the raiders began moving again, they passed by the corpse. Bixby shied away from it and collided with Taylor's mount.

"Rein your goddamn horse, Sam!" Taylor snarled.

The dead man was wearing canvas trousers and was shirtless and barefoot. Even in the dark, Sam could see that his head was nothing but a mass

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of pulp.

It made no sense. This man wasn't a Red Leg or a Bluebelly. He might not even be an abolitionist. He was only a farmer. Colonel Quantrill had shot a farmer. Just because the man couldn't find his way in the dark.

Just because he was a Kansan.

Sam began to wonder if the preposterous stories he had read in abolitionist newspapers – the stories about Quantrill's raids on Aubry, Olathe, and Shawneetown – might have had some truth in them after all.

The column halted again after only a mile, and there was another gunshot. Then another farmhouse was raided, and the bushwhackers continued on their way. But soon they stopped once more, and a third shot was fired.

The process was repeated again and again. Each time, Sam and Bixby passed by a fresh corpse.

There were ten in all.

Sam felt dizzy and sick. This was supposed to be a raid to punish the Red Legs, destroy the newspaper, burn out Jim Lane, and recover stolen property. Some Kansans were to be killed, yes; but they were supposed to be Red Legs and Bluebellies, not unarmed farmers taken from their wives and children in the night.

At the tenth corpse, Taylor maneuvered his horse past Sam and Bixby. "'Scuse me, Clemens," Taylor said. "My horse is starting to make water."

Taylor stopped the horse over the dead man and let it piss on the body. The bushwhackers who were close enough to see it laughed, and Sam tried to laugh as well. He didn't want them to see his horror. He was afraid of them all now. Even Taylor. Especially Taylor.

"Have your horses drink deep at the next crick, boys!" Taylor chortled. "There's plenty of men in Lawrence who need a bath as bad as this one!"

"Amen to that!" someone cried.

The shout was echoed up and down the line as Taylor rejoined the column next to Sam.

Captain Gregg came riding back once more. "I admire your sentiments, boys," he said, "but I suggest you save the noise until we reach our destination. Then you can holler all you want, and see if you can squeeze a few hollers from the so-called men of Lawrence as well!"

The bushwhackers laughed again, but then lowered their voices to whispers. To Sam, it sounded like the hissing of five hundred snakes.

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He saw now that what was going to happen in Lawrence would resemble what he had imagined it would be only in the way that a volcano resembled a firefly. He had let his guilt over Orion's death and his hatred of the Red Legs blind him to what the men he was riding with had become. He wanted to turn Bixby out of the column and ride hard and fast back to Missouri, not stopping until he reached Hannibal.

But he knew that he couldn't. Anderson had told them all how deserters would be dealt with. Sam and Bixby wouldn't make it more than a hundred yards before a dozen men were after them. And there was no doubt of what would happen to Sam when they caught him.

Besides, his and Taylor's report from their trip to Lawrence was part of what had convinced Quantrill that the raid was possible. That made Sam more responsible for what was about to happen than almost anyone else. To run away now would make him not only a coward, but a hypocrite.

Another farmhouse was raided at about three in the morning, and this time the entire column broke up and gathered around to watch. By the time Sam was close enough to see what was happening, the farmer was on his knees in his yard. Captain Todd was standing before him holding a pistol to his forehead and telling him the names of some of the men waiting for him in hell.

Quantrill, on Black Bess, came up beside Todd. "We're too close to Lawrence to fire a gun now, George," he said.

Sam could just make out Todd's expression. It was one of fury.

"Goddamn it, Bill," Todd said. "This man's name is Joe Stone. He's a stinking Missouri Unionist who ran off to Kansas to escape justice, and I'm going to kill him no matter what you say."

Stone, wearing only a nightshirt, was shuddering. Sam looked away from him and saw a woman crying in the doorway of the house. A child clung to the woman's knees, wailing. An oil lamp was burning inside, and its weak light framed the woman and child so that they seemed to be suspended inside a pale flame.

Quantrill stroked his stubbled face with a thumb and forefinger. "Well, George, I agree that traitors must die. But we're within six miles of Lawrence now, and a shot might warn the town."

Todd seemed about to retort, but then took his pistol away from Stone's head and replaced it in his belt. "All right," he said. "We'll keep it quiet." He strode to his horse and pulled his Sharps carbine from its scabbard.

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"Sam!" he called. "Get over here!"

Taylor nudged Sam in the ribs. "Go on," he said.

Sam, almost rigid with terror, began to dismount.

"I mean Sam Clifton," Todd said. "Where is he?"

Sam returned to his saddle as Clifton, a stranger who had joined the guerrillas while the spies had been in Lawrence, dismounted and went to Todd.

Todd handed the rifle to Clifton. "Some of the boys tell me you've been asking a lot of questions, Mister Clifton," he said. "So let's see if you know what you're here for." He pointed at Stone. "Beat that traitor down to hell."

Clifton didn't hesitate. He took three quick steps and smashed the rifle butt into Stone's face. Stone fell over in the dirt, and his wife and child screamed. Then Clifton pounded Stone's skull.

Sam wanted to turn away, but he couldn't move. This was the most horrible thing he had ever seen, more horrible even than his brother Henry lying in his coffin or his brother Orion lying in the road. He watched it all. He couldn't stop himself.

Only when it was over, when Clifton had stopped pounding and Stone was nothing but a carcass, was Sam able to look away. Beside him, Taylor was grinning. Some of the others were grinning too. But there were also a few men who looked so sick that Sam thought they might fall from their horses.

Then he looked at Colonel Quantrill. Quantrill's eyes were unblinking, reflecting the weak light from the house. His lips were pulled back in a tight smile.

Todd took his rifle back from Clifton and replaced it in its scabbard without wiping it clean. Then he looked up at Quantrill with a defiant sneer.

"That suit you, Colonel?" he asked.

Quantrill nodded. "That suits me fine, Captain," he said. Then he faced the men. "Remember this, boys," he cried, "and serve the men of Lawrence the same! Kill! Kill, and you'll make no mistake! Now push on, or it'll be daylight before we get there!"

"You heard the man," Taylor said to Sam.

"That I did," Sam said. His voice was hoarse. He thought it might stay hoarse forever.

The raiders pushed on, leaving Mrs. Stone and her child to weep over the

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scrap of flesh in their yard.

As the column reformed, Sam found himself near its head, riding not far behind Gregg, Todd, Anderson, and Quantrill himself. It was as if God wanted to be sure that Sam had another good view when the next man died.

The eastern sky was turning from black to purplish-gray as Quantrill's raiders reached the crest of the hill southeast of Lawrence. Colonel Quantrill raised his right hand, and the column halted.

Below them, less than two miles ahead, Lawrence lay as silent as death.

Fletch Taylor cackled. "Look at 'em! Damn Yankees are curled up with their thumbs in their mouths!"

Sam nodded, sick at heart.

QUANTRILL BROUGHT out a spyglass and trained it on the sleeping town. "It looks ripe," he said. "But I can't see the river; it's still too dark." He lowered the glass and turned to Captain Gregg. "Bill, take five men and reconnoiter. The rest of us will wait fifteen minutes and then follow. If you spot trouble, run back and warn us."

Gregg gave Quantrill a salute, then pointed at each of the five men closest to him. "James, Younger, McCorkle, Taylor, and — " He was looking right at Sam.

Sam couldn't speak. His tongue was as cold and heavy as clay. He stared at Frank James.

"Clemens," Taylor said.

"Right," Gregg said. "Clemens. Come on, boys." He kicked his horse and started down the hillside.

"Let's get to it, Sam," Taylor said. He reached over and swatted Bixby on the rump, and Bixby lurched forward.

Despite the steep slope and the trees that dotted it, Gregg set a rapid pace. All Sam could do was hang on to Bixby's reins and let the horse find its own way. He wished that Bixby would stumble and that he would be thrown and break an arm or leg. But Bixby was too agile for that. Sam would be in on the Lawrence raid from beginning to end.

Halfway down the hill, Gregg stopped his horse, and James, Younger, McCorkle, and Taylor did the same. Bixby stopped on his own, almost throwing Sam against the pommel of his saddle.

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"What's wrong, Captain?" Taylor asked.

Gregg put a finger to his lips and then extended that finger to point.

A few hundred feet farther down the hillside, a mule carrying a lone figure in a white shirt was making its way up through the trees. The mule and rider were just visible in the predawn light.

"What's someone doing out here this early?" Taylor whispered.

"Doesn't matter," Gregg whispered back. "If he sees us and we let him escape, we're as good as dead."

"But, but a shot would wake up the town, Captain," Sam stammered.

Gregg gave him a glance. "Then we won't fire a shot that can be heard in the town." He turned toward Frank James. "Go kill him, Frank. Use your knife, or put your pistol in his belly to muffle the noise. Or knock his brains out. I don't care, so long as you keep it quiet."

James drew his pistol, cocked it, and started his horse down the hill.

The figure on the mule came around a tree. He was alone and unarmed. Sam could see his face now. He was the printer's devil from the Lawrence *Journal*.

Henry.

Frank James plunged downward, his right arm outstretched, pointing the finger of Death at an innocent.

And in that instant, Sam saw everything that was to come, and the truth of everything that had been. He saw it all as clearly as any of his dreams:

The boy would be lying on his back on the ground. His white shirt would be soaked with blood. Sam would be down on his knees beside him, stroking his forehead, begging his forgiveness. He would want to give anything to undo what had been done. But it would be too late.

Henry would mumble about his family, about the loved ones who would never see him again. And then he would look up at Sam with reproachful eyes, and die.

Just as it had happened before.

Not when Sam's brother Henry had died. Henry had given him no reproachful look, and all he had said was "Thank you, Sam."

Not when Orion had died, either. Orion had said, "Get out of here, Sam," and there had been no reproach in the words. Only concern. Only love.

Frank James plunged downward, his right arm outstretched, pointing the finger of Death at an innocent.

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An innocent like the one Sam had killed.

It had been more than just a dream. He had told himself that he wasn't the only one of the Marion Rangers who had fired. He never hit anything he aimed at anyway. But in his heart he had known that wasn't true this time. He had known that he was guilty of murder, and of the grief that an innocent, unarmed man's family had suffered because of it.

All of his guilt, all of his need to make amends —

It wasn't because of his dead brothers at all.

It was because he had killed a man who had done nothing to him.

Sam had tried to escape that truth by fleeing West with Orion. But then, when Orion had been murdered, he had tried instead to bury his guilt by embracing it and by telling himself that the war made killing honorable if it was done in a just cause. And vengeance, he had told himself, was such a cause.

But the family of the man he had killed might well have thought the same thing.

Frank James plunged downward, his right arm outstretched, pointing the finger of Death at an innocent.

And Sam couldn't stand it anymore.

He yelled like a madman, and then Bixby was charging down the hill, flashing past the trees with a speed no other horse in Quantrill's band could equal. When Bixby came alongside James's horse, Sam jerked the reins. Bixby slammed into James's horse and forced it into a tree. James was knocked from his saddle, and his pistol fired.

Henry's mule collapsed, and Henry tumbled to the ground.

Sam reined Bixby to a halt before the dying mule, leaped down, and dropped to his knees beside the boy.

Henry looked up at him with an expression of contempt. "Are you crazy or something?" he asked.

Sam grabbed him and hugged him.

Henry struggled to get away. "Mister Clemens? What in the world are you doing?"

Sam looked up the slope and saw Frank James picking himself up. James's horse was standing nearby, shaking its head and whinnying.

Gregg, Taylor, McCorkle, and Younger were riding down with their pistols drawn.

Sam jumped up and swung Henry into Bixby's saddle. "Lean down close

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to me," he said.

"What for?" Henry asked. The boy looked dazed now. He was staring down at the dead mule.

"Just do it, and listen to what I say," Sam said. "I have to tell you something without those men hearing it."

Henry leaned down.

"Ride back to town as fast as you can," Sam said. "When you're close enough for people to hear, yell that Charley Hart's come back, that his new name is Billy Quantrill, and that he has five hundred men with him. And if you can't remember all that, just yell 'Quantrill!' Yell 'Quantrill!' over and over until you reach the Eldridge House, and then go inside and yell 'Quantrill!' at everyone there. If they don't believe you, just point at this horse and ask where the hell they think you got it. Now sit up!"

Henry sat up, and Sam slapped Bixby on the rump. Bixby turned back and tried to bite Sam's shoulder.

"Not now, you fleabag!" Sam yelled. He raised his hand to swat the horse again, but Bixby snorted and leaped over the dead mule before Sam could touch him. The roan charged down the hillside as fast as before, with Henry hanging on tight.

Sam took a deep breath and turned as he exhaled. Frank James was walking toward him with murder in his eyes, and the four men riding up behind James didn't look any happier. Sam put his hand on the Colt in his belt, but didn't think he could draw it. He feared that he was going to piss his pants. But he had to give Henry a good head start. And if that meant getting himself killed – well, that was just what it meant. Better him than a boy whose only crime was setting type for an abolitionist newspaper.

"You traitorous bastard," James said, raising his revolver to point at Sam's face.

Sam swallowed and found his voice. "Your barrel's full of dirt," he said.

James looked at his gun and saw that it was true.

Captain Gregg cocked his own pistol. "Mine, however, is clean," he said.

Sam raised his hands. "Don't shoot, Captain," he said. He was going to have to tell a whopper, and fast. "I apologize to Mister James, but I had to keep him from killing my messenger, didn't I? I would've said something sooner, but I didn't see who the boy was until James was already after him."

"Messenger?" Gregg said.

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Sam looked up at Taylor, whose expression was one of mingled anger and disbelief. "Why don't you say something, Fletch? Didn't you recognize the boy?"

Taylor blinked. "What are you yapping about?"

Sam lowered his hands, put them on his hips, and tried to look disgusted. "Damn it, Fletch, that Missouri boy I met in Lawrence. The one whose father was killed by jayhawkers, and who was kidnapped to Kansas. I pointed him out to you Saturday morning, but I guess you'd gotten too drunk the night before to retain the information."

Gregg looked at Taylor. "You were drinking whiskey while you were supposed to be scouting the town, Corporal?"

Taylor became indignant. "Hell, no!"

"Then why don't you remember me pointing that boy out to you?" Sam asked.

"Well, I do," Taylor said uncertainly.

Sam knew he couldn't let up. "So why didn't you tell Captain Gregg that the boy promised to come here and warn us if any more Federals moved into Lawrence?"

Taylor's eyes looked panicky. "I didn't recognize the boy. It's dark."

"What's this about more Bluebellies in Lawrence?" Gregg asked.

"That's what the boy told me," Sam said. "Six hundred troops, four hundred of them cavalry, came down from Leavenworth on Tuesday. They're all camped on the south side of the river, too, he says."

Frank James had his pistol barrel clean now, and he pointed the gun at Sam again. "So why'd you send him away?"

Sam was so deep into his story now that he almost forgot his fear. "Because he said the Bluebellies have started sending fifty cavalrymen out between five and six every morning to scout the plain between here and Mount Oread. I told him to go keep watch and to come back when he saw them."

Cole Younger, stern-faced and narrow-lipped, gestured at Sam with his revolver. "Why would you tell someone in Lawrence who you were and why you were there?"

"I already said why," Sam snapped. "Because he's a Missouri boy, and he hates the Yankees as much as you or me. Maybe more, because he didn't even have a chance to grow up before they took everything he had. And I didn't just walk up and take him into my confidence for no reason. Two

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Red Legs were dunking him in a horse trough until he was half drowned. When they left, I asked him why they'd done it, and he said it was because he'd called them murdering Yankee cowards. My opinion was that we could use a friend like that in Lawrence, and Fletch agreed."

John McCorkle, a round-faced man in a flat-brimmed hat, peered at Sam through narrowed eyelids. "So how'd the boy know where we'd be, and when?"

"He knew the where because we told him," Sam said. "The Colonel used to live in these parts, and he picked this hill for our overlook when he planned the raid. Ain't that so, Fletch?"

Taylor nodded.

"As for the when of it," Sam continued, "well, Fletch and I knew we'd be here before sunup either yesterday or today, so we told the boy to come out both days if there was anything we needed to hear about."

Younger looked at Taylor. "That true, Fletch? Or were you so drunk you don't remember?"

Taylor glared at him. "It's true, Cole. I just didn't tell you, is all. There's five hundred men on this raid, and I can't tell every one of you everything, can I?"

Younger started to retort, but he was interrupted by the sound of hundreds of hoofbeats from the slope above. Quantrill had heard James's gunshot and was bringing down the rest of his men.

Gregg replaced his pistol in its holster. "All right, then," he said, sounding weary. "Let's tell the Colonel what the boy said." He looked at Taylor. "You do it, Fletch. He knows you better than he does Clemens."

Taylor nodded, then shot Sam a look that could have melted steel.

There was a promise in that look, but Sam didn't care. Gregg had believed his story, and for now, at least, he was still alive.

And so was Henry.

Taylor told Colonel Quantrill that a Missouri boy had come to warn the raiders about six hundred new Bluebellies in Lawrence, all camped south of the river, and that a scouting party of fifty of the Federals was likely to spot the bushwhackers before they could enter the town. Quantrill listened without saying a word. He stared straight ahead, toward Lawrence, until Taylor was finished. Then he looked down at Sam, who was still standing before the dead mule.

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Quantrill's eyes were like chips of ice, but Sam didn't look away. He was sure that if he flinched, the Colonel would see him for the lying traitor that he was.

A long moment later, Quantrill turned to Captain Todd. "What do you think, George?" he asked.

Todd looked as if he had eaten a bad persimmon. "You didn't see six hundred Federals through the glass, did you?"

"No," Quantrill said, "but I couldn't see the river. If they were camped close by its banks, they would have been invisible."

"Then let's go back up and take another look," Todd said.

Quantrill shook his head. "By the time the sun has risen enough for us to see the river, the people of Lawrence will have risen too. We must either press on now, or give it up."

"But if there are that many more troops down there," Gregg said, "we won't have a chance. I say we fall back to the border, send more spies to take another look at the town, and come back when we can be sure of victory."

Quantrill looked at the ground and spat. "Damn it all," he said, "but you're right. Even if there aren't that many troops, the town might've heard the pistol shot."

The men behind Quantrill murmured. Many looked angry or disappointed, but almost as many looked relieved.

Sam tried hard to look disappointed, but he wanted to shout for joy.

Then Bill Anderson shrieked, drew one of his pistols, and kicked his horse until it was nose to nose with Black Bess.

"We've come too far!" he screamed, pointing his pistol at the Colonel. "We've come too far and our people have suffered too much! This raid was your idea, and you talked me into committing my own men to the task! God damn you, Quantrill, you're going to see it through!"

Quantrill gave Anderson a cold stare. "We have received new intelligence," he said. "The situation has changed."

Anderson shook his head, his long hair flying wild under his hat. "Nothing has changed! Nothing! The Yankees have killed one of my sisters and crippled another, and I won't turn back until I've killed two hundred of them as payment! And if you try to desert me before that's done, the two-hundred-and-first man I kill will be named Billy Quantrill!"

Quantrill turned to Todd. "George, place Captain Anderson under

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arrest."

Todd drew his pistol. "I don't think I will," he said, moving his horse to stand beside Anderson's. "We've come to do a thing, so let's do it."

The murmurs among the men grew louder.

"What's wrong with you?" Gregg shouted at Todd and Anderson. "Colonel Quantrill is your commanding officer!"

Todd sneered. "No more of that 'Colonel' bullshit. Jefferson Davis wouldn't give this coward the time of day, much less a commission."

At that, Frank James, John McCorkle, and Cole Younger moved to stand with Anderson and Todd. Bill Gregg, Andy Blunt, and John Holt moved to stand with Quantrill. The murmurs among the bushwhackers became shouts and curses. A few men broke away and rode back up the hill.

Sam decided that he didn't care to see the outcome. He began edging backward, but came up against the dead mule.

Quantrill looked as calm as an undertaker. "All right, boys," he said. "I guess you're right. We've come this far, and we've whipped Yankee soldiers before." He pointed toward Lawrence. "Let's push on!"

"That's more like it," Anderson said, and he and his comrades turned their horses toward Lawrence.

As soon as they had turned, Quantrill pulled two of his pistols from his belt, cocked them, and shot Bill Anderson in the back. Anderson slumped, and his horse reared.

The hillside erupted into an inferno of muzzle flashes, explosions, and screams.

Sam dove over the mule and huddled against its back until he heard pistol balls thudding into its belly. Then he rolled away and scrambled down the hill on his hands and knees. When there were plenty of trees between him and the fighting, he got to his feet and ran. He fell several times before reaching the bottom of the hill, but didn't let that slow him.

The trees gave way to prairie grass and scrub brush at the base of the hill, and Sam ran straight for Lawrence. He couldn't see Henry and Bixby on the plain ahead, so he hoped they were already in town.

Thunder rumbled behind him, and he looked back just in time to see the neck of a horse and the heel of a boot. The boot struck him in the forehead and knocked him down. His hat went flying.

Sam lay on his back and stared up at the brightening sky. Then the silhouette of a horse's head appeared above him, and hot breath blasted

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his face.

"Get up and take your pistol from your belt," a voice said.

Sam turned over, rose to his knees, and looked up at the rider. It was Fletch Taylor. He had a Colt Navy revolver pointed at Sam's nose.

"You going to kill me, Fletch?" Sam asked.

"Not on your knees," Taylor said. "Stand up, take your pistol from your belt, and die the way a man should."

Sam gave a low, bitter chuckle. He was amazed to discover that he wasn't afraid.

"All men die alike, Fletch," he said. "Reluctantly."

Taylor kept his pistol pointed at Sam for another few seconds, then cursed and uncocked it. He looked toward the hill. "Listen to all the hell you've raised," he said.

The sounds of gunshots and screams were wafting out over the plain like smoke.

Taylor looked back at Sam. "You saved my life," he said, "so now I'm giving you yours. But if I ever see you again, I'll kill you."

Sam nodded. "Thank you, Fletch."

Taylor's lips curled back from his teeth. "Go to hell," he said. Then he spurred his horse and rode back toward the hill.

Sam watched Taylor go until he realized that the fighting on the hillside was spilling onto the plain. He stood, found his hat – the hat that Taylor had given him – and ran for Lawrence again.

When he reached Massachusetts Street, staggering, exhausted, he saw men in the windows of every building. Some wore blue uniforms, but most were civilians. Each man held either a revolver or a carbine. The sun was rising, and Lawrence was awake. One of the men came outside and pointed his rifle at Sam, but the boy named Henry appeared and stopped him. Then Henry grabbed Sam's arm and pulled him into the Whitney House.

Fifteen minutes later, Sam was watching from the window of a second-floor room when a magnificent black horse came galloping up Massachusetts Street. The horse's rider, wearing an embroidered gray shirt, gray pants, and black cavalry boots, had his arms tied behind his back and his feet tied to his stirrups. His head and shoulders had been daubed with pitch and set ablaze. He was screaming.

"It's Quantrill!" someone cried.

A volley of shots exploded from both sides of the street, and the horse

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and rider fell over dead.

Within seconds, a hundred Missouri guerrillas led by George Todd charged up the street. Fourteen of them were cut down in a hail of lead balls, and the rest turned and fled, with soldiers and citizens pursuing. A company of Negro Federal recruits led the chase and killed three more bushwhackers at the southern edge of town.

When the gunfire and shouting had ceased, a cluster of townspeople gathered around the carcass of the black horse and the charred, bloody corpse of its rider. The crowd parted to let two men in black suits and hats approach the bodies. Sam recognized them as the preachers that he, Taylor, and Noland had encountered the week before.

The elder preacher held a Bible over Quantrill's corpse. "Earth to earth," he intoned.

The younger preacher raised his Bible as well. "Ashes to ashes," he said.

In unison, they chanted, "And dust to dust."

Then they lowered their Bibles, drew their revolvers, and shot Quantrill a few more times for good measure.

"Amen," said the crowd.

Sam closed his curtains.

Senator Jim Lane had returned to Lawrence on Wednesday for a railroad meeting, and he sent for Sam at noon on Saturday, one day after the failed raid. Lane was thinner, younger, and had more hair than Sam had guessed from the caricatures, but his fine house on the western edge of town was all that Sam had supposed. It was packed with expensive furnishings, including two pianos in the parlor.

"How did you come to acquire two pianos, Senator?" Sam asked. He had not slept the night before and did not care if he sounded accusatory.

Lane smiled. "One was my mother's," he said. "The other belonged to a secessionist over in Jackson County who found that he no longer had a place to keep it." The Senator picked up a pen and wrote a few lines on a piece of paper, then folded the paper and pushed it across the table. "Kansas is grateful to you, Mister Clemens, and regrets the mistake of two years past when members of the Red-Legged Guards mistook your brother for a slaveholder. Had they known of his appointment as Secretary of Nevada Territory, I'm sure the tragedy would not have occurred."

"He told them," Sam said. "They didn't believe him."

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Lane shrugged. "What's done is done, but justice will be served. General Ewing has ordered his troops to arrest all Red Legs they encounter. He believes that such men have been committing criminal acts in the name of liberty, and I must concur." He tapped the piece of paper. "I'm told that Governor Nye of Nevada Territory is again in need of a Secretary. I cannot guarantee you the appointment, but this should smooth your way." He leaned forward. "Frankly, Mr. Clemens, I think your decision to continue to Nevada is a good one. There are those in this town who believe that the burning man was not Quantrill at all, and that you are here not as a friend, but as Quantrill's spy."

Sam stared at the piece of paper. "A ticket on the overland stage from St. Joseph is a hundred and fifty dollars," he said. "I have ten."

Lane stood and left the parlor for a few minutes. When he returned, he handed Sam three fifty-dollar bank notes and a bottle of whiskey.

"This was distilled from Kansas corn," the Senator said, tapping the bottle with a fingernail. "I thought you should have something by which to remember my state."

Sam tucked the money into a coat pocket and stood, holding the whiskey bottle by its neck. *My state*, Lane had said. What's done is done.

"Good day, Senator," Sam said. He started to turn away.

"Don't forget my letter of introduction," Lane said.

Sam picked up the piece of paper, tucked it into his pocket with the money, and left the house.

Henry was standing outside holding Bixby's reins, and twelve Bluebellies waited nearby. They had an extra horse with them.

"Mister Clemens," one of the soldiers called. "Our orders are to escort you to St. Joseph. We're to leave right away." He didn't sound happy about it. All of the Bluebellies in the escort were white, and Sam suspected that this was their punishment for failing to chase the bushwhackers with as much vigor as their Negro counterparts.

Sam nodded to the soldier, then looked down at Henry. "I suppose you want to keep the horse," he said.

"Well, *I* don't," Henry said. "He's mean, if you ask me. But my pa says he'll either have Bixby as payment for his mule, or he'll take it out of somebody's hide. And since you're running off, I reckon my hide will do him as well as any."

"A hiding would probably do you a considerable amount of good," Sam

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said, "but since I no longer have a use for the animal, you may keep him and the saddle as well. I'll take the bags, however." He removed the saddlebags from the horse and put the bottle of whiskey into one of them. A few lumps of brown sugar lay at the bottom of that bag, so he fed one to Bixby. Bixby chewed and swallowed, then tried to bite Sam's hand. Sam gave the rest of the sugar to Henry and took his saddlebags to the soldiers' extra horse.

"Goodbye, Mister Clemens," Henry said, climbing onto Bixby. "I won't forget you."

Sam swung up onto his own mount. "Thank you, boy," he said, "but I shall be doing my best to forget *you*, as well as every other aspect of this infected pustule of a city."

Henry gave him a skeptical look. "Mister Clemens," he said, "I think you're a liar."

"I won't dispute that," Sam said. "I only wish I could make it pay."

The Bluebellies set off, and Sam's mount went with them. Sam looked back to give Henry and Bixby a wave, but they were already heading in the other direction and didn't see him.

On the way to the ferry, Sam and the soldiers passed by the Eldridge

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House, where eighteen bodies had been laid out on the sidewalk. They were already beginning to stink. A number of townspeople were still gathered here, and from what Sam could hear, they were curious about the dead black man, who had been one of the three raiders killed by the Negro recruits. Why on earth, they wondered, would a man of his race ride with Quantrill?

Sam started to say, "Because he was paid," but the words froze in his throat.

The last four bodies on the sidewalk were those of George Todd, Cole Younger, Frank James, and Fletcher Taylor.

Sam looked away and rode on.

He spent Saturday night camped beside the road with the soldiers and Sunday night in a hotel in St. Joseph, and did not sleep either night. At daybreak on Monday, he carried his saddlebags to the overland stage depot, paid his money, and boarded the coach. Two other passengers and several sacks of mail soon joined him, and the coach set off westward at eight o'clock.

As the coach passed the spot where Orion had been killed, Sam took out

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the whiskey that Lane had given him and began drinking. He offered some to his fellow passengers, but they each took one swallow and then refused more, saying that it was the vilest stuff they'd ever tasted. Sam agreed, but drank almost half the bottle anyway.

At the next station stop, he climbed atop the coach with his saddlebags while the horses were being changed. When the coach started moving again, Sam drank more whiskey and stared at the fields of green and gold. Soon, his head warm with sun and alcohol, it occurred to him that the corn and grass shifting in the breeze looked like ocean swells after a storm. He was reminded of a holiday he had spent near New Orleans, looking out at the Gulf of Mexico after piloting a steamboat down the Mississippi. He wondered if he would love anything in Nevada half as much.

The thought of Nevada reminded him of the letter that Jim Lane had written for him, so he took it out and read it:

*My dear Governor Nye:*

*You will recall that your intended Secretary of two years past, Mr. Orion Clemens, was unfortunately killed before he could assume his duties. This letter will introduce his younger brother Samuel, who has provided service to his Nation and is a loyal Republican. I trust you shall do your utmost to secure for him any employment for which he might be suited.*

*Yours most sincerely,*
*James Lane, Senator*
*The Great and Noble State of Kansas*

Sam tore up the letter and let its pieces scatter in the wind. If Nevada held "any employment for which he might be suited," he would secure it without any assistance from a self-righteous, thieving son of a bitch like Jim Lane.

Nor would he drink any more of Lane's abominable whiskey. He leaned over the coach roof's thin iron rail and emptied the bottle onto the road. Then he opened one of his saddlebags, took out his Colt, and stood. He held the whiskey bottle in his left hand and the pistol in his right.

The coach conductor glanced back at him. "What are you doing, sir?" he asked.

Sam spread his arms. "I am saying fare-thee-well to the bloody state of Kansas," he cried, "and lighting out for the Territory!"

He looked out over the tall grass. It rippled in waves.

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He missed the river.

He missed his brothers.

But killing men for the sake of a world that was gone wouldn't bring it back. It was time to make a new one.

"Half-less twain!" he cried.

Both the conductor and driver stared back at him.

"Quarter-less twain!" Sam shouted.

Then he brought his left arm back and whipped it forward, throwing the bottle out over the grass. As it reached the apex of its flight, he brought up his right arm, cocked the Colt with his thumb, and squeezed the trigger.

The bottle exploded into brilliant shards.

The coach lurched, and Sam sat down on the roof with a thump.

"Goddamn it!" the conductor yelled. "You spook these horses again, and I'll throw you off!"

Sam held the pistol by its barrel and offered it to the conductor. "Please accept this," he said, "with my apologies."

The conductor took it. "I'll give it back when you're sober."

"No," Sam said, "you won't."

Then he threw back his head and roared: "MAAARRRRK TWAIIIINN!"

Two fathoms. Safe water.

He lay down with his hat over his face and fell asleep, and no dead men came to haunt his dreams.

For Sam Clemens, the war was over.

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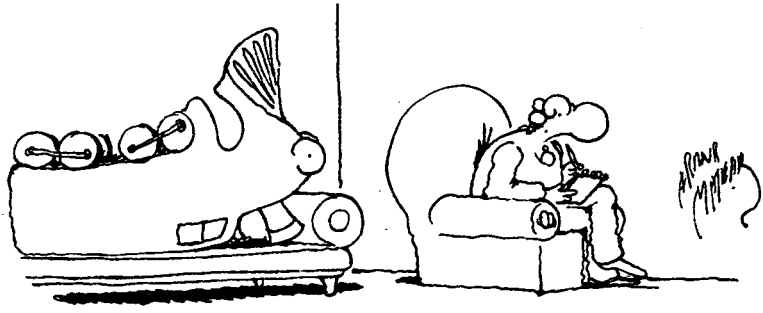
# Coming Attractions

AUGUST TAKES us to distant shores. **Ray Aldridge** returns with "Winedark," a modern-day fantasy set off the coast of Greece. **Vance Aandahl** gives us an inverted science fiction story, titled "The First Invention."

But the strangest story in the issue — and the inspiration for our cover — comes from **Marc Laidlaw.** "The Vulture Maiden" is set in Tibet. Tibet provided the setting for Marc's novel *Neon Lotus* (Bantam 1988), a science fiction novel set in the 21st century. But, in researching "The Vulture Maiden," Marc used the most current information available about the situation inside of the Shining Hill monastery, monks who worship an odd and often forboding creature known as the Vulture Maiden . . .

Future issues will bring another story from Marc, this one in collaboration with **Paul Di Filippo. Steve Perry** and **George Guthridge** will revive their collaboration for a stunning science fiction story, and my collaborator, **Kevin J. Anderson,** will provide a scary look at the future of nanotechnology. **Terry Bisson, Algis Budrys,** and **John Brunner** will return to these pages as well, along with **Nancy Springer** and **Kit Reed.**

Don't miss an issue! You'll find subscription forms on page 158.



*"I know I can't! I know I can't! I know I can't!"*

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WHAT'S HAPPENED TO DR. QUARK?
CYBORG INSTITUTE
YOU MUST BE DR. QUARK.
YES. I'M HERE TO SEE MR. BORAX.
GOOD TO SEE YOU, QUARK. HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN?
GEE—I DON'T KNOW.
AS YOU CAN SEE, WE'VE EXPANDED OUR FACILITY SIXTEENFOLD — STOP KICKING ME.
OOPS, SORRY... OOPS, SORRY...
OUR CYBORGS NOW BUILD OTHER CYBORGS—VON NEUMANN'S SELF-REPLICATING-ROBOTS-DREAM COME TRUE. NOT OUT THE WINDOW, QUARK, HERE!
IN YOUR LETTER YOU SAID YOU HAD MADE QUITE A BREAKTHROUGH.
CAN YOU DO THIS?
VERY FUNNY, QUARK. YOUR CONFOUNDED CYBORG BROKE DOWN. HOW DO I GET HIM STARTED AGAIN?
CHECK THE FUSES. IF THAT DOESN'T WORK, GIVE HIM TWO OR THREE CUPS OF COFFEE.
J. Harris

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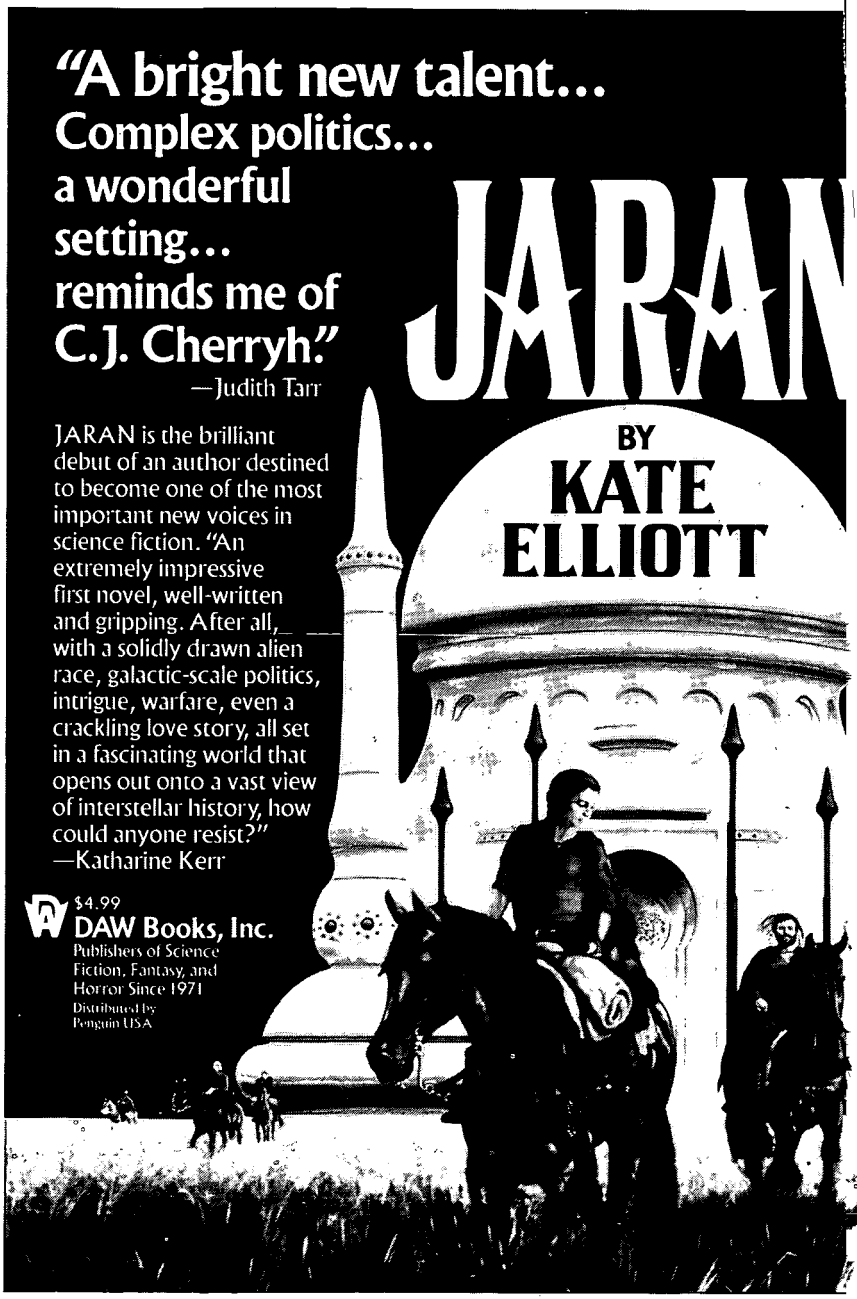
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